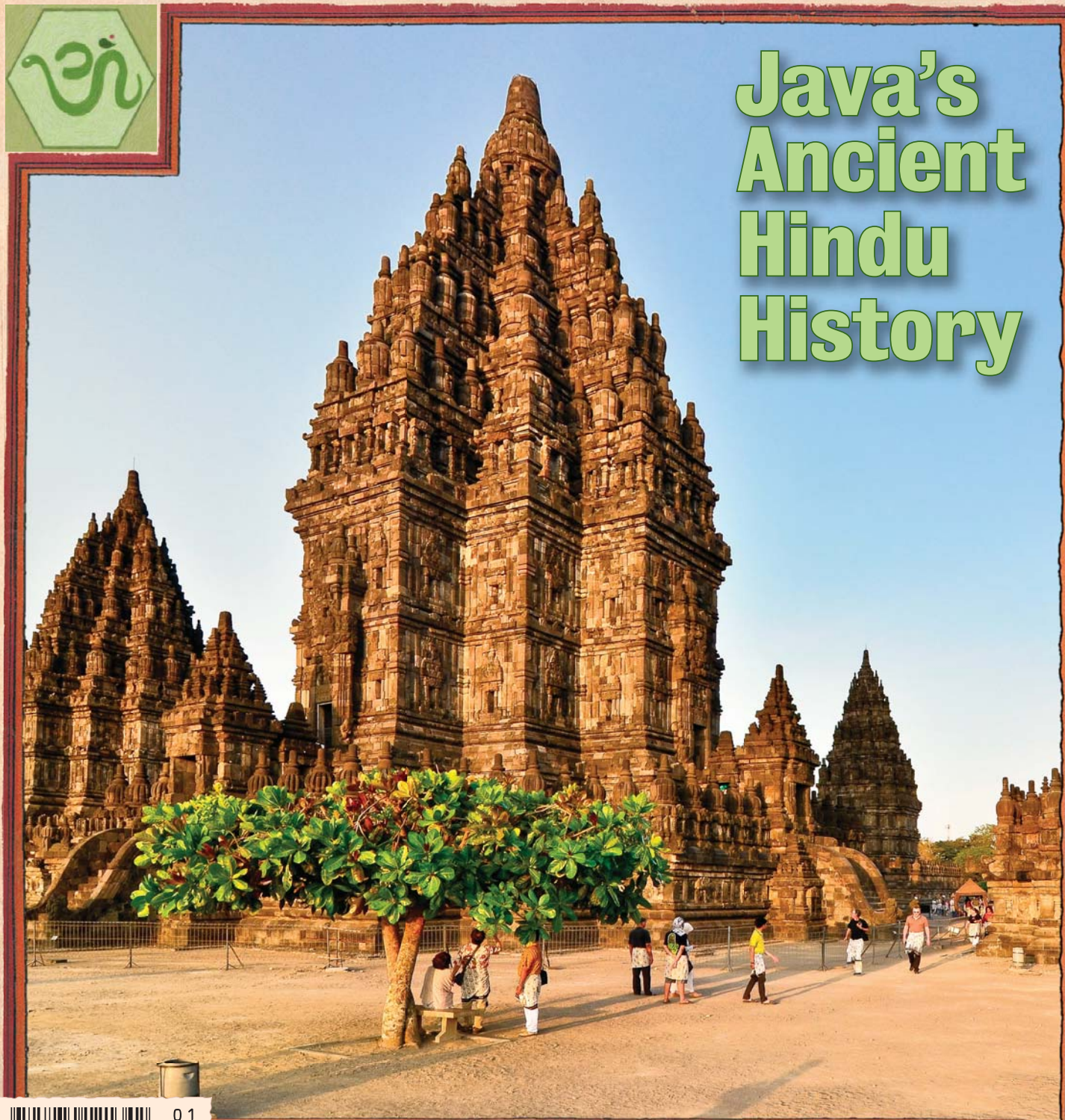
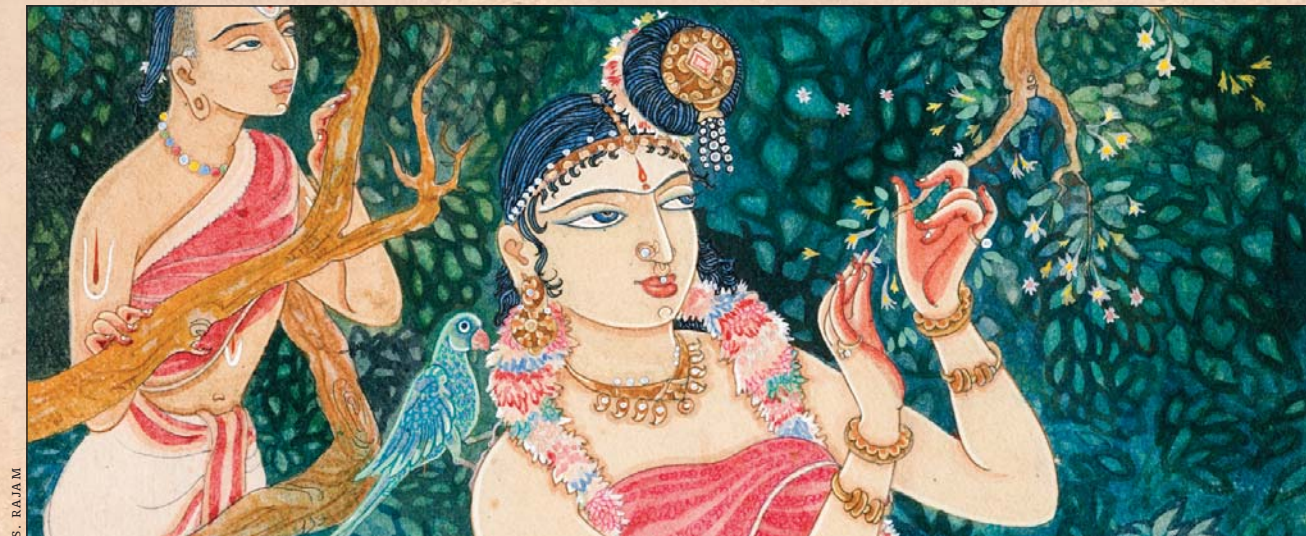


# HINDUISM TODAY

Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



## Java's Ancient Hindu History



COVER: Central Siva shrine of Prambanan Hindu temple glows golden brown in the evening light. It was built in the 9th century CE by the Hindu kings of central Java; (above) A look into ancient Hindu scriptures reveal India's long-standing respect for women.

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*Bodhinatha Veylanswami*  
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### INTERNATIONAL

- Feature:** The Ancient Javanese Were Avid Temple Builders Who Left Us Spectacular Works 18
- Temples:** BAPS Opens the First Installment of What Will Be North America's Largest Hindu Temple 28
- Festival:** A Lively Nepalese Festival Celebrates an Ancient Story of Indra and Ganesha 32
- Insight:** Our Classic Summary of the Nine Central Beliefs of Twelve Major Religions 36
- Offering:** A Feast of Rice for Both Deity & Devotee 48
- Exhibits:** Where Krishna's Life Comes Alive 50
- Profile:** Award-Winning Sculptor Perumal Sthapati Has Created Murtis for Temples Worldwide 54
- Pilgrimage:** One Person's Sacred Trek to the Eight Ganesha Temples Near Pune 62
- Goddesses:** Saraswati is a Favorite Deity Among Japanese Buddhists 66
- Book Review:** *Sciences of the Ancient Hindus* 68

### LIFESTYLE

- The Guru:** The Blessing of Having a Preceptor 34
- Growing Up Hindu:** Lessons I Learned from My Childhood in Canada 47
- Scripture:** The Status of Women in Ancient India 58

### OPINION

- In My Opinion:** What the Disciplined Practice of Indian Dance Can Teach Our Youth 9
- Publisher's Desk:** The Purpose of Our Practices 10
- Letters** 12
- From the Agamas:** The Perpetually Enlightened State Sought by the Renunciate 17

### DIGESTS

- Global Dharma** 6
- Quotes & Quips** 14
- Digital Dharma** 86

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# A Marble Masterpiece

Ninety-one elephants, each holding a different item and wearing a unique and traditional caparison (ornate blanket) and jewelled headdress, are carved into the inner sanctum's surrounding wall at the newly inaugurated BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Robbinsville, New Jersey ...see page 28



# GLOBAL DHARMA

NEW DELHI

## Returning Gods

ON A RECENT TWO-DAY VISIT to New Delhi in early September, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott returned two 900-year-old murtis of Lord Nataraja and Ardhanarishvara to the Indian government. The Nataraja—worth well over five million dollars—was taken from a temple in the village of Sripuranthan in Tamil Nadu, in blatant violation of India's cultural property laws. The statue was sold in February 2008 to the National Gallery of Australia through an Indian-born

antiquities dealer, who has since been arrested and accused of organizing a sizable smuggling ring. The Ardhanarishvara murti was purchased by the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2004 for approximately \$280,979.

The Nataraja is said to have eventually returned back to the Sripuranthan temple, receiving a joyful “welcome home” from devotees. Prateep Philip, additional director general of police, said this prompt return by Australia will act as a deterrent to future global traffickers, stating:



**Welcomed home:** Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, returns the two stolen statues to India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi

“It is an important case, which has global ramifications.” He may be right. Just a month later, a bronze Ganesha was returned

to India, having been linked to the same dealer and previously displayed at the Toledo Museum of Art.

ITALY

## Celebrating Chaturthi

IN AUGUST OVER 2000 PEOPLE from across Southern Europe traveled to Gitananda Ashram in northern Italy to celebrate Ganesha Chaturthi. The ashram, which was founded in 1984, has been holding this public event each year. Following tradition, the day began with special puja to Lord Ganesha in the temple and ended with the parading of

the Deity.

Presentations were made by the Consul General of India and Italy's Indian ambassador. Monastics told *La Stampa*, “Our celebration of Ganesha Chaturthi is based in our prayers for world peace. We wish it for everyone, without distinction, and we hope that our request will be heard.”



**Teaching teachers:** Two of the project's trained instructors give a demonstration of the Virabhadrasana pose

core weekly activities include yoga asanas, meditation, self-inquiry, performing arts, health and disease education, relationship building and community

activism. Many of the program's yoga teachers and students have been lifted from lives of crime and poverty into places of stability and dharmic living.



**A sweet find:** This recovered Ganesha murti was carved from granite in the Chalukyan style sometime in the 12th century

ANDHRA PRADESH

## Under the Sugar Factory

JUST DAYS BEFORE GANESHA Chaturthi, in late August, an auspicious discovery was made at Laxmipuram in the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh. While digging for the foundation of the new Sri Lakshmi Ganapathi Temple, a 12th century Ganesha murti was uncovered. The area happens to be part of the KCP Sugars factory, under which Ganesha had resided.

According to an article in *The Hindu*, the sugar company had started work in the northeast corner of their operation in preparation for the temple construction. The excavator

operator stopped when he heard an odd sound while digging. He discovered a stone structure, and upon carefully removing the soil, found the three-foot granite murti.

KCP's CEO Venkateswara Rao said they immediately alerted officials of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, who rushed to the premises to examine the Ganesha. He later explained they had been planning the temple for the last three years. He stated: “When we finally commenced the work, we found a Ganesha murti. This really is a blessing from God.”



SCOTLAND

## Edinburgh's Vijayadashami

A MOTORCADE SPORTING TWO large likenesses of Ganesha and Hanuman drove through Edinburgh in mid-September, followed by devotees dressed as devas, asuras and Hanuman's monkey army, all proceeded by—that's right—bagpipes! In celebration of the final day of Navaratri, Hindus in Scotland took to the streets with their own cultural flair to enjoy one of the largest free and independent festivals in the country.

Hundreds paraded from Edinburgh's Festival Square to Calton Hill, where 25-foot demon effigies were set ablaze to

commemorate Durga's victory over Mahishasura. Each year the effigies are constructed by the inmates of Saughton Prison, who learn skills in carpentry and design in the process.

This was the 20th year that Vijayadashami has been publicly celebrated in Scotland's capital. The many events included cultural programs integrating Scottish and Indian music and dance, as well as arts and crafts, workshops for children and of course, plenty of traditional Indian food. Glasgow, Scotland's second largest city, also saw a large turnout of celebrants.



**Blending cultures:** A man dressed as a sadhu leads the Lothian and Borders Police Band as they parade from Festival Square to Calton Hill in Edinburgh

BANGLADESH

## A Walk Down Hindu Street

SETTLED BY HINDU ARTISANS over 300 years ago, Shankaria Bazaar, or “Hindu Street” as it is commonly known, is a testament to the rich cultural art forms that still flourish deep within Bangladesh's capital city of Dhaka. This street is interspersed with richly decorated

**Murti shop:** A shop making Ganesha images on Shankaria Bazaar's main street

colonial-period brick buildings, held between narrow alleyways and small shops. The bazaar's many workshops are owned by an array of artists and craftsmen. Painters, carvers, potters, jewelers, kite makers, tailors, and more are distributed along the street. Branching alleyways and staircases lead to courtyards and living spaces. It is a buzzing atmosphere of color, art, unique people and a lasting culture.



## Submerging Temples?

NEARLY ONE HUNDRED TEMPLES and historical monuments in the Nalgonda district of the state of Telangana are in danger of being submerged as a result of the Pulichinthala Project, a large multi-purpose irrigation and hydroelectric reservoir which opened in December of 2013.

The reservoir is of great importance for use by farmers, as well as irrigation, power and flood control for the surrounding area. However, it has raised some major issues. The increasing

water levels have caused the displacement of over 6,700 families from 13 villages—four of which will go underwater by the time the reservoir reaches just a quarter of its capacity. Relocation efforts are progressing for the people, but the plans for moving the historical temples and monuments have seen delays in their implementation. Though the reservoir will be filled slowly over the next three years, the water is already beginning to overtake some of these important sites.



**Going underwater:** A villager of Vellatur points to the submerged Papanasheshwara Swamy Temple in the Pulichinthala Project in Nalgonda district

### BOOKS

## The Short Path to Enlightenment

PAUL BRUNTON WAS ONE OF the major players in last century's dramatic introduction of yoga and Hindu spirituality to the West. In the 1930's he described meetings with yogis, sadhus and gurus in books that opened up wondrous new worlds to the spiritually inclined. After he had a life-transforming mystical experience while sitting with Ramana Maharishi, his writings became infused

**The author:** Mr. Brunton (1898-1981) was a British writer, philosopher and mystic

with teachings of the Self. His subtle philosophy and keen insights wrapped in an articulate and modern idiom are still much appreciated today.

Larson Publications has just released *The Short Path to Enlightenment*, a book of selected passages from Brunton's voluminous notes. "The title is not meant to imply a shortcut to illumination," explains publisher Paul Cash, who was Brunton's friend and disciple. "On the contrary, in this work, Brunton disapproves of those who claim to teach instant realization and

of a simplistic sort of Vedanta, popular today, which confuses intellectual understanding for enlightenment." The term "short path," here, refers to the book's principal theme, that the Self is immediate, near to us, not distant in time or space, to be grasped in a timeless now. "But much evolution must happen to come to that point," Cash stresses. "It is a crucial distinction for today's seekers to understand, and it is why we released these notes at this time."



## BRIEFLY...

**THIS YEAR'S HINDU MANDIR** Executives' Conference was held September 19-21, 2014, in Orlando, Florida. Over 200 adult and youth delegates attended, representing some 85 mandirs and Hindu organizations throughout North America. The theme of this year's conference was the role of temples in Hindu education.

**POLICE IN THE PROVINCE OF SAN** Luis, Argentina, will have an opportunity to participate in the department's new "Ayurvedic

Anti-Stress Program," learning proven methods to reduce stress levels. The many benefits of this program have been demonstrated by over 600 scientific studies at over 250 universities and medical schools in 33 countries.

**HINDUS, SIKHS, BUDDHISTS,** Jains and Zoroastrians observed the 2014 Dharma festival at the Royal Garden in Stockholm, Sweden on August 30. The festival was organized several years ago to help spread understanding of the Dharmic faiths.

**IN EARLY SEPTEMBER A RESIDENT** of Tamil Nadu found his cow had given birth to a calf with three eyes. Locals are hailing the calf as an incarnation of God Siva, born to bless the village.

**ACCORDING TO AN ARTICLE BY** *The Indian Express*, a court in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh (not a vegetarian state) has banned the sacrificing of animals for religious reasons. On September 1st the court deemed the practice cruel and barbaric and has asked police and officials to enforce the ban throughout the state. The two judges stated, "No person will sacrifice any animal in any

place of worship. This includes adjoining lands and buildings." The ban is currently receiving opposition from local priests.

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and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred Vedas and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this seva by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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### IN MY OPINION

## Bharatanatyam's Hidden Powers

More than art, Indian dance is a transformative personal discipline that elevates our society

BY NIKOLINA NIKOLESKI

THE DECLINE OF interest in classical Indian dance is a truly sad trend.

The whole Bharatanatyam movement needs to go through a renaissance. We must educate everyone, especially the youth, to appreciate and understand the real value of Bharatanatyam. The whole process of learn-

ing of Bharatanatyam has opened new layers of my personality. I do things with more focus and concentration.

Different mudras change the energies in your body. You experience this when you learn, train, practice, rehearse and perform. I get this every day when I enter the studio and work on myself. Finally when the piece is ready, it is chiseled and perfected then I can share it as a gift with the audience. What is most important is what happens inside me when I am trying to go into the characters which I have to perform. You imagine what happened in *Mahabharata*, the complexity of the characters and the story. It changes something inside you and how you deal with other people.

Bharatanatyam has so many layers, psychological, physical and emotional, which make it different from other dance forms. If you perform Siva, you go through so many attributes and qualities. If it is Krishna or the gopis, you may be a woman, a mother, sister, daughter and a friend. Bharatanatyam has that endless richness in which you keep discovering a new potential about yourself, about others. If we explain how Bharatanatyam has these values, I am sure people will come back to it.

Dance is a powerful personal discipline. The body tends to be lazy. It rebels, it does not listen—not in the mood, not so inspired. We fight every day to transcend our own instinctive nature. There are days you do not want to get up and are feeling tired. So the whole process is against your nature and you have to be in charge. It is a big challenge. You



come to the class flat, lazy and tired, and then you overcome it all. You take command of your limbs, your arms and everything. This gives immense empowerment—feeling that you are in charge of your destiny, your life and handling the whole situation around you.

When you are dancing, you cannot think about cooking or other things. You are just there.

Your whole focus is on your hand movements and *abhinaya* (acting). You feel every movement. So you get very sharp clarity of the mind. It is like yoga. Once you do sadhana and pranayama and you know the affect it has on your body, you will feel relaxed and focused. Instead of being addicted to, say, chocolate, when you dance and do yoga you get happiness from your own body. It is a positive addiction. Your body creates hormones of happiness, the flow of adrenalin, the alertness of the mind. Every day through sadhana you can get the same feeling. I would not say it is hard. I would say it is hard not to do it, because once you have tasted it you know what you are losing every day by not doing it. You know what exhilaration you have experienced before.

Classical Indian dance is the identity of the culture of the nation, and preserving it is the first duty of the people of India. It also gives so many values to society. It creates elevated and alert human beings. If you are performing arati, chanting the name of Krishna, and dancing for hours during the day, in the evening you are not likely to take drugs, kill people or do or say bad things. Dance creates human beings who are more conscious and more aware, who are more compassionate and less aggressive.

NIKOLINA NIKOLESKI, 37, is a professional dancer and choreographer from Croatia, who teaches Bharatanatyam, yoga, classical ballet and contemporary dance at Nikolina Nikoleski Dance Academy in New Delhi.



# The Aim of Hindu Practices

Dharma, seva, puja and raja yoga lead to purification of the mind, which is the essence of all spiritual endeavors

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

**O**FTEN IN PRESENTING HINDUISM'S PRACTICES, the actions themselves are described with little or no explanation of their purpose. This may have worked well in days of yore, but today practitioners demand clear reasons and insights into their sadhanas. Four traditional practices can inform our exploration. 1) Hindus are taught to follow dharma and refrain from adharmic actions, such as harming others, stealing and lying. 2) Seva, selfless service, is to be done regularly. 3) Puja is performed or attended in the home shrine daily, and weekly at a nearby temple. 4) The disciplines of raja yoga, which include profound forms of meditation, are a daily practice for the most devout.

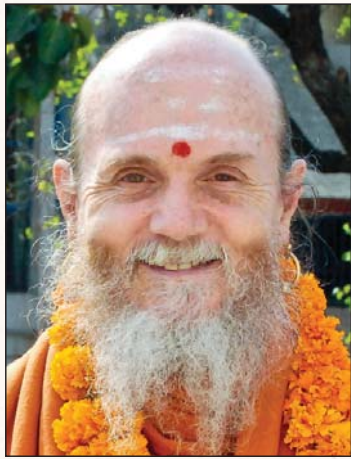
What makes these practices important? A rationale for religious practices in Western faiths is that they define the good path which leads the observant to heaven. However, that is not why they are important in Hinduism and other Eastern religions.

To begin answering the above question, let's examine a core Hindu belief: man's innate divinity. Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, articulated it beautifully: "Deep inside we are perfect this very moment, and we have only to discover and live up to this perfection to be whole. We have taken birth in a physical body to grow and evolve into our divine potential. We are inwardly already one with God. Our religion contains the knowledge of how to realize this oneness and not create unwanted experiences along the way."

An analogy will illustrate this idea. Imagine a pond of water with large gold nuggets at the bottom. If the surface of the pond has ripples due to wind, or if the water is clouded by mud or pollution, we cannot see the gold nuggets from above. The nuggets represent our soul nature; the ripples on the surface of the pond represent an active intellectual mind; and the water's cloudiness represents subconscious impurities. In order to experience our soul nature and its oneness with God, our intellect must be quiet and our mind must be pure. We also need to be a sensitive and humble observer.

This analogy reveals the answer to our question "What is the reason Hindu spiritual practices are important?" They are important because of their impact on our mind. That impact is threefold: 1) they purify the mind; 2) they quiet the intellect and 3) they spiritualize the ego, thereby allowing us to eventually experience our divine essence. Here I will focus on the first of these, but keep in mind that the other two are equally essential to spiritual progress and effort.

An entry in the *Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (India Heritage Research Foundation) tells us: "*Shuddhi* means purification. *Chitta* is mind. Purification of the mind (*chitta-shuddhi*) may be called the essence of all spiritual endeavors." Purification is the process of removing or



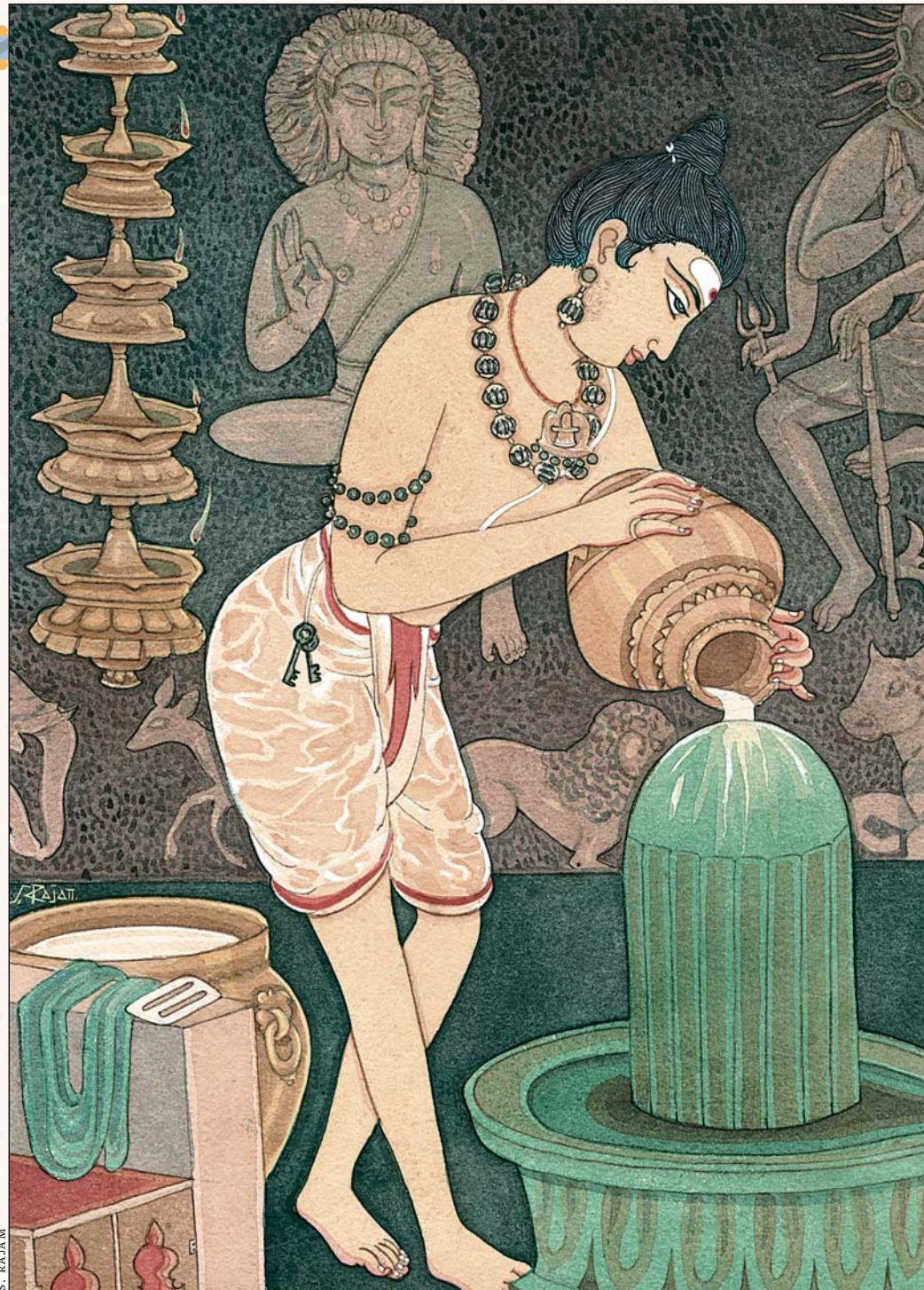
resolving subconscious impressions, called *samskaras*, of past misdeeds and troublesome experiences from this and past lives. Note that more commonly *samskara* refers to a sacrament or rite done to mark a significant transition in life, such as the marriage rite, *vivaha samskara*. These sacraments make deep and positive impressions on the mind of the recipient, inform the family and community of changes in the lives of its members and secure inner-world blessings. Here the term *samskara* refers to the imprints left on the subconscious mind by all experience, which then mold one's nature and affect the course of life.

The *Encyclopedia* explains, "Mental impurities are the root cause of pleasure and pain, and therefore they perpetuate the cycle of birth and death. Breaking this cycle and thus putting an end to sorrow (*duhkha*) is the goal of Hindu religion and philosophy. The surest means of achieving this goal is *chitta-shuddhi*." The four practices mentioned above—dharma, seva, puja and yoga—purify the mind in the following ways.

**Dharma:** Adhering to dharma and refraining from adharmic actions, such as harming others, stealing and lying, assures that we are not increasing the mind's impurity.

**Seva:** Also known as karma yoga, seva is a powerful tool for reducing mental impurities. Adi Shankara expressed this in *Vivekachudamani*: "Work is for the purification of the mind, not for the perception of Reality. The realization of Truth is brought about by discrimination, not in the least by ten millions of acts." My guru encouraged devotees to perform four hours of seva each week, especially service focused on helping others: "Lift their burdens just a little bit and, unknowingly perhaps, you may lift something that is burdening your mind. You erase and wipe clean the mirror of your own mind through helping another. We call this karma yoga, the deep practice of unwinding, through service, the selfish, self-centered, egotistical *vasanas* of the lower nature that have been generated for many, many lives and which bind the soul in darkness."

Our own *Hindu Lexicon* explains, "Vasanas are subliminal inclinations and habit patterns which, as driving forces, color and motivate one's attitudes and future actions and thereafter contribute to mental



fluctuations, called *vritti*." A *vasana* is created when two *samskaras* blend together, forming an amalgam that is stronger than either individual experiential impression. Swami Harshananda writes in *A Concise Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*: "*Vasana* is a strong impression in the mind. It is so strong that, when it arises in the mind, a person is forced to act without thinking of the consequences." *Vasanas* can be negative or positive. It is, of course, the negative ones we want to soften through seva.

**Puja:** Attending pujas at a temple and in the home shrine, our third primary practice, purifies the mind through the exchange of prana, an aspect of puja and homa that is not often discussed. Puja is a process of giving prana to the Deity through offerings of fruit, cooked foods, water, incense, fragrant flowers and milk. Then,

**Practice, practice, practice:** A *bhaktar* offers fresh cow's milk to the Sivalingam, part of his daily spiritual disciplines which also include meditation, service and following a virtuous path.

during the culminating arati, the Deity and his helpers, or devas, reflect back this prana into the aura of each devotee, purifying it of subconscious congestions. The devotee so blessed leaves feeling uplifted and relieved of mental burdens.

After an elaborate homa performed in our Hawaii temple by his three priests, Jayendrapuri Mahaswami of Kailash Ashram in Bengaluru, India, explained that Agni, the messenger God of fire, conveys the offerings in a purified form to the Deity, who then uses the prana to bless those present. The effect of such blessings can be life-altering, as Gurudeva observed: "Darshan coming from the great temples of our Gods can change the patterns of karma dating back many past lives, clearing and clarifying conditions that were created hundreds of years ago and are but seeds now, waiting to manifest in the future. Through the grace of the Gods, those seeds can be removed if the manifestation in the future would not enhance the evolution of the soul."

**Raja Yoga:** Rishi Patanjali extols the purifying power of our fourth practice, raja yoga, in his *Yoga Sutra*: "When the [eight] limbs of yoga are practiced, impurities dwindle and radiant knowledge manifests, leading to discrimination as to their difference." He particularly highlights the purifying effect of austerity, *tapas* (which is part of the second limb, *niyama*). Tiruvalluvar's *Tirukural* provides this insight: "As the intense fire of the furnace refines gold to brilliance, so does the burning suffering of austerity purify the soul to resplendence." This verse may bring to mind images of yogis subsisting on nettle soup in a remote Himalayan cave or bathing in freezing waters. Though *tapas* does embrace such intense practices, it also includes easier ones that can be done by anyone.

A simple form of *tapas* is sacrifice, giving up a cherished possession—be it money, time or a physical object—to manifest a greater good. Sacrifice, while similar to charity, is distinguished by some form of self-denial. Examples I like are fasting for a day and giving the money saved to a Hindu institution, and saving money for charity by going on a budget vacation instead of a fancy one.

Performing penance to atone for misdeeds is another form of *tapas*. This is done through such acts as 108 prostrations before the Deity in the temple, walking prostrations around a temple, and *kavadi*—a penance offered to Lord Murugan/Karttikeya. Gurudeva elaborates, "Austerity is the powerful bath of fire and bright rays of showering light that washes the soul clean of the dross of its many past lives, and of the current life, which has held it in the bondage of ignorance, misgiving, unforgiveness and the self-perpetuating ignorance of the truths of the Sanatana Dharma."

We can take joy in the fact that Hindu practices well performed impact our mind and transform our consciousness. It is through purifying the mind, quieting the intellect and spiritualizing the ego that we are able to grow and evolve and ultimately experience our soul nature and its oneness with God. Our paramaguru, Yogaswami of Sri Lanka, described this process: "When worldly attachment and impurity of the mind disappear, then there is *atma-darshan*."





## LETTERS

### Yoga in Schools

A school in the San Diego, California, area recently implemented a yoga program for their students. Several Christian parents banded together to attempt to stop the teaching of yoga in the school on the basis that yoga is religious in nature. The judge who gave the ruling stated, in summary, yoga as it is taught in the USA is distinctly American and not religious in nature. Do Hindus believe that yoga is religious in nature? If so, do they think this case may set a precedent of publicly separating their religious heritage, yoga, from their religion? If "yoga" as it is taught in the USA is distinctly American, is it truly yoga any longer? I wonder if there is any benefit in the larger Hindu community stepping forward, affirming that yoga is religious and establishing Sanatana Dharma's claim upon yoga in this modern commercial era?

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### Teaching Caste

I am writing in response to the September 25, 2014, article in *Hindu Press International* titled, "Did you Study Indian History and Hinduism in California During 6th Grade?"

I live in London and have two children—one in 3rd grade and one in 1st grade. Although I may not be able to help directly with your question, I would like to raise some important issues for you to consider during this project.

My daughter has also come home on a few occasions and said "Mom, I do not want to be Indian or Hindu!" Through the last couple of years they have studied the Victorian era, the Viking period and British slave trade. All of

which included far more inhumane acts than the caste system has ever or will ever bring about.

The Victorian era included the pathetic conditions that children worked and died in and the corporal punishment they suffered. However no British child felt ashamed or apologetic to be British. Another class taught that the Vikings brutally cut off arms and fingers. One of the girls in the class, who's family are descendants of Vikings, proudly stood up and said "I am a Viking!"

History is history and cannot be changed. While I am all for teaching the positives that came and come from India, my feeling is that we need to look deeper into the fact as to why we feel ashamed of being called "Indian." Why does a question about our past make us feel ashamed or apologetic, as though we represent those things, and yet a Western child feels proud of his or her heritage, however brutal? Is it that parents somehow pass this shame on to their kids? Is it the parents themselves who don't feel proud of their heritage and culture? Why do we inherently feel apologetic for who we are? Why are we not able to study the caste system objectively and academically?

ANITA MARTINS  
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### Living an Ahimsa Lifestyle

Thank you so much for the wonderful magazine HINDUISM TODAY. My family and I are learning so much about our religion and culture from this amazing publication. I'm a Indian-American Hindu, and I strive to follow the path of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) every day. I live by the sacred phrase, "*ahimsa parama*

*dharma*," which means, "nonviolence is the supreme way." According to the *Bhagavad Gita*, God resides in every creature, so I try my best not to harm animals. According to the *Bhagavata Purana*, "Deer, camels, donkeys, monkeys, rats, creeping animals, birds and flies should be considered no different than one's own children." I strongly feel that animals should be respected and that it is my responsible to do so. I have no right to use animals for my personal use.

The United States may be a majority meat-eating society, but its people are becoming more compassionate every day. Thanks to blogs, YouTube, Internet forums, Facebook and Twitter, the cruel conditions of animals in the meat and leather industries have been exposed and people are becoming inspired to help stop the suffering of innocent animals. Whenever I tell my friends and family in India, that I'm thriving on a vegetarian diet in US, they find it hard to believe. People generally have the notion that it's hard to be a vegetarian in Western countries.

Many decades ago it was considered weird to be a vegetarian in the US, but these days it's trending. Libraries and bookstores are awash with vegetarian cookbooks and the Internet is brimming with numerous food blogs containing healthy and nutritious recipes. These days you can get vegetarian food at airports, hospitals and in school cafeterias. Before visiting a new city or a country, I make it a point to visit [happycow.com](http://happycow.com) and search for information on the area's vegetarian restaurants and health food stores. In short, the United States is a paradise for vegetarians, despite what people may think. Even everyday items that once contained animal products can now be found in animal friendly versions. These

days many companies are going animal-friendly by also not doing animal testing. The website [leapingbunny.org](http://leapingbunny.org) is a great resource for cruelty-free companies and products. Sometimes, cruelty-free products are a bit expensive, but I take comfort in the fact that I'm not involved in harming animals.

KUMUDHA VENKATESAN  
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### Views of Christians

I have been enjoying your informative magazine for years, but I sometimes wince when I read its references to Christianity. On page 48 of your most recent edition, it is asserted that Christians believe that "only good Christians will be saved and accepted into heaven." Certainly there are Christian sects teaching this, but the major denominations, comprising the vast majority of Christians, do not. We all believe that Christ is the Savior, but we do not limit His saving activity to the confines of the Church. I suspect there are Hindu fundamentalist sects with perspectives not shared by mainstream Hindus. There are also Christian fundamentalist sects with perspectives not shared by mainstream Christians.

REV. DR. KEVIN HOLSAPPLE  
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### True Dharma

I am unable to put in words my appreciation of your laudable work through this magazine and letting the world know the happenings and awakening taking place regarding the only True Dharma—i.e. Sanatana Dharma which is presently known as Hindu Dharma—has evolved. We have reached the philosophical pinnacle in the principle of Advaita while permanently laying down the proper and best way to lead this life in conformity with nature and surroundings—the basis of which is love of everyone and everything.

In the last century the exploitation of nature and the pollution of all natural resources came to light. Now all the world is scared of this, but has no solution to this problem engulfing humanity and Mother Earth itself. All the wise persons are busy pondering this, which will at least delay the end.

G.D. APTE  
PUNE, INDIA

### Dawn of the Sat Yuga

According to His Most Divine Rishidev Narendranji, the founder mentor of Shaktiveda Research Foundation, the world is living in Sat Yuga, the Golden Age of Truth, since September 9, 2006. There is no need of a new name for the New Age.

Mental and elemental cleansing shall be

the cardinal plan of action for human beings in this Sat Yuga. If the mind is not contaminated, noble thoughts will flow inwards incessantly. Cleansing has to be done in psychospiritual and physical levels through the procedures bestowed by the Supreme Creator. Purity of mind, body and soul will be thus attained. By purification of thoughts, worries will be mitigated. Subsequently, Truth will be accepted and established through noble activities.

SATHYAN MUTTAMBALAM  
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*By traditional dating, mankind is now experiencing the Kali Yuga, which began at midnight, February 18, 3102 bce and will end in approximately 427,000 years. However, according to Hinduism Today's founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, in his book, Lemurian Scrolls, we are actually in the Sat Yuga. It began when man learned to light the night by his own devices, marked by the inventions of Thomas Edison and others in 1879.*

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

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or faxed to: (808) 822-4351  
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Swami Durganatha Shanmuga, Administrator.



## When Spirituality Hits You over the Head

How you can help disseminate Hinduism's treasures and help souls find their way

**A**FTER HAVING LIVED CHALLENGING and spirited lives in Alaska, Peshani and Shyamadeva Dandapani recently retired to a warmer Oregon, where they now enjoy a quiet spiritual retreat.

Since she was 15, Peshani has flown airplanes for sport and as a profession. For 20 years, she taught and trained pilots while also flying air taxis to all parts of Alaska.

Shyamadeva grew up in the wild, wild wilderness of Alaska, "beyond the end of the road," he explains. "Our family lived off the land, without electricity or modern amenities. There were no people around; our neighbors were bears, moose, caribou, wolves and dozens of other critters. And there was lots of silence." To attend school, he canoed two miles downriver in the summer, and skated the same route in the winter. He eventually emerged from the wilds to join the military which, by comparison, struck him as the soft and easy life.

In 1994, while on the island of Kauai, they happened upon the book *Dancing with Siva* by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY. "We were stunned, as if the book had hit us over the head. In just a few words, it answered our most urgent life-questions. Then, incredibly, we learned the author and guru was living just a few miles from where we were. We rushed to meet him, and the rest is history. One year later, we were proud and happy Hindus. We read and reread the guru's works and his magazine, we set up a home shrine and began daily sadhana. What we've learned and become since, nothing else in life can compare."

Peshani and Shyamadeva have supported HINDUISM TODAY generously for 20 years.



**Testimony:** "*Hinduism Today helps free us from the bonds of ordinary thinking.*"

"And we'll support it for the rest of our lives," they pledge. "We visualize the Hinduism Today Production Fund [which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment] one day growing strong enough to allow the magazine to publish more often, so that more souls may be 'hit over the head' as

we were, and find their way."

Please do as the Dandapanis do: help disseminate Hinduism's treasures ever more widely.

Donate to the Hinduism Today Production Fund at: [hheonline.org](http://hheonline.org)  
Contact us at: [hhe@hindu.org](mailto:hhe@hindu.org)  
or call 1-808-634-5407



## QUOTES & QUIPS

### Bear insult, bear injury, that is the highest sadhana.

**Swami Sivananda** (1887–1963), founder of Divine Life Society

If you desire the world, you may try to renounce it in order to escape sorrow. Instead, renounce desire! Then you will be free of sorrow, and the world will not trouble you. *Ashtavakra Gita* 16.9

God is not a limited individual who sits alone up in the clouds on a golden throne. God is pure consciousness that dwells within everything. Understanding this truth, learn to accept and love everyone equally. **Mata Amritanandamayi Ma**, Hindu spiritual leader

The sages, being filled with universal love for all beings, did not want to keep their enlightenment to themselves. They declared to all: "O mortals, striving and struggling upon this Earth plane, weeping, wailing, buffeted by the vicissitudes of life: we have come upon a great discovery. There is something beyond these appearances, these

vanishing names and forms that go to make up this universe. There is something beyond which is the very source and support of all these objects of the phenomenal world. Why do you search in vain for happiness outside? Come, come, happiness resides within." **Swami Chidananda** (1916–2008), president of Divine Life Society

You may develop a thousand virtues and be reckoned as the greatest in the land. But the lotus of your heart will not blossom until you receive the grace of the Guru, the grace of God! **Dada J.P. Vaswani**, spiritual leader and head of the Sadhu Vaswani Mission

Come apart from the clever argumentation of contending theology and, for a brief while, look inward, that one look shall drive the nail into the coffin of birth and forever end its cycle recurring. *Tirumantiram* 1631

Bury yourself in God. Do that and the spoiling magnetism and wrong hypnotism that you have got from these worldly objects will leave you; your mind will be running in order again. You will be again inspired. **Swami Rama Tirtha** (1873–1906), yogi and writer

Hinduism is not just a faith. It is the union of reason and intuition that cannot be defined but is only to be experienced. Evil and error are not ultimate. There is no Hell, for that would mean there is a place where God is not and there are sins which exceed His love. **Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan** (1888–1975), first Vice President of India

Every man usually has something he can do better than anyone else. Usually it is reading his own handwriting. **J. Norman Collie** (1859–1942), British scientist

#### DID YOU KNOW?

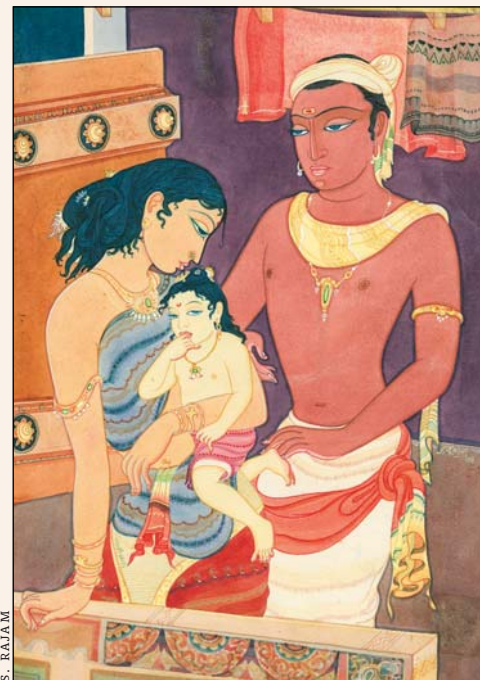
### When Is a Child a Hindu by Birth?

**T**HE ISSUE IS DISCUSSED IN BOTH MODERN and ancient Indian law. The Hindu succession act of 1956 governs the disposition of property of a person who is legally a Hindu and who dies without a will. As with all Indian law, *Hindu* is defined to include Buddhists, Jainas and Sikhs. With regard to children, section 1.2.1.b states, "Any child, legitimate or illegitimate, one of whose parents is a Hindu, Buddhist, Jaina or Sikh by religion and who is brought up as a member of the tribe, community, group or family to which such parent belongs or belonged" is a Hindu for purposes of the act.

The ancient *Dharma Shastras*, such as the *Yajnyavalkya Smriti* and *Parasara Smriti*,

according to Dr. Sabharathnam of Chennai, state that the child inherits the father's religion and not the mother's, just as it inherits the father's *gotra*, or family lineage, and not the mother's. Even if the child had been brought ceremonially into another religion, he states, it could be returned to the Hindu fold by performance of the necessary rituals, for example, by giving the child a ceremonial bath and then a Hindu name. After that, the parents should see that the other childhood rites of passage, *samskaras*, are given at the appropriate times in the child's life.

Asked about this issue, HINDUISM TODAY publisher Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami observed that currently in the US, if both parents consider the children to be Hindu and the children have Hindu first names, then the community also views them as Hindus. The issue can become quiet contentious when a divorce occurs, with governing US law varying from state to state.



"Case closed," affirmed Sgt. Christopher Perry of the Newington, Connecticut, police department, after a town employee unknowingly fished a large, colorful statue from Mill Pond Park and brought it to the police. The police posted a picture on Facebook thinking it had been lost and were informed that the statue was Lord Ganesha, and Hindus had permission from the parks and recreation department to dissolve it in the pond.

True, you have worked hard for many years. But you must aspire until the end. There is no such thing as a pension in the spiritual life. **Sri Chinmoy** renowned spiritual leader, author, poet and artist

We choose our joys and sorrows long before we experience them. **Swami Chinmayananda** (1916–1993), founder of Chinmaya Mission

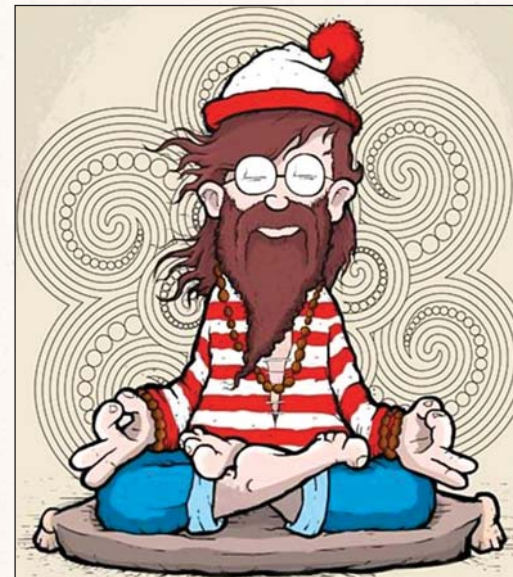
Stop dreaming that you are just an ordinary mortal, constantly going through mental ups and downs. No matter what happens, remember always that you are made in

the true image of Spirit. **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893–1952), disciple of Sri Yukteswar

Let there be no neglect of the duties to the Gods and the fathers. Be one to whom the mother is a God. Be one to whom the father is a God. Be one to whom the teacher is a God. Be one to whom the guest is a God. *Krishna Yajur Veda*, 1.11.1

Tapas is like a large wildfire, the best you can do is try to control it when it burns. Sometimes it flares up on its own and sometimes the guru causes it. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, publisher of *Hinduism Today*

He is a man on the path of enlightenment who has arrived at a certain subsuperconscious state and wishes to stay there. Therefore, he automatically has released various interactions with the world, physically and emotionally, and remains poised in a contemplative, monastic lifestyle. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), founder of *Hinduism Today*



**Waldo**  
finds himself.

JOSH MECOUGH

#### BASICS

### The Power of Yantras and Gems

**C**OMMONLY DEFINED AS A VESSEL OR A container, the yantra is a mystical diagram composed of geometric and, occasionally, alphabetic figures. It is usually etched on small plates of gold, silver or copper and is sometimes three dimensional, formed from stone or metal. A yantra's function is to focus the spiritual and mental energies according to a circuit-like pattern that can be oriented toward health, wealth, childbearing, the invocation of the Gods and more. It is usually installed near or under a temple Deity. Psychically seen, the temple yantra is a magnificent three-dimensional edifice of light and sound in which the devas work. On the astral plane, it is much larger than the temple itself.

The Sri Chakra (at right), is the most well known yantra and is a central image in Shakta worship. Consisting of nine interlocking triangles, this yantra is the

design of Siva-Shakti's multidimensional manifestations. For Saivites, the Tiru-Ambala Chakra yantra, representing Lord Nataraja, is most sacred. Yantras are also used for meditation and sadhana.

The *Agamas* prescribe the installation of precious gems beneath temple Deities. Also, according to the *Agamas*, placing of a yantra beneath the Deity—as has been done in some modern temples—disturbs the spiritual forces associated with other substances placed in the pedestal, such as the precious gems. The yantra is to be placed in front of the Deity.

The *Agamas* state that nine gems will polarize the nine essential aspects of an ideal society. At the center of the installed gems beneath the Deity is a ruby, denoting the power of speech. Beryl is set in the east, denoting the power of knowledge; sapphire in the southeast signifying the health and strength of the physical body; emerald in the south representing the prosperity of families and the abundance of fields; a pearl in the southwest denoting a plenitude of wealth and grains; hesonite in the west distinguishing a society

blessed with virtuous sons and daughters; a diamond in the northwest conveying the welfare of cows and other animals; topaz in the north representing the unfailing welfare of the village; and coral in the northeast denoting the presence of all human virtues.





# How Enlightened Men Live



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## The Guru Chronicles

THE MAKING OF THE FIRST AMERICAN SATGURU  
By the Swamis of Kauai's Hindu Monastery



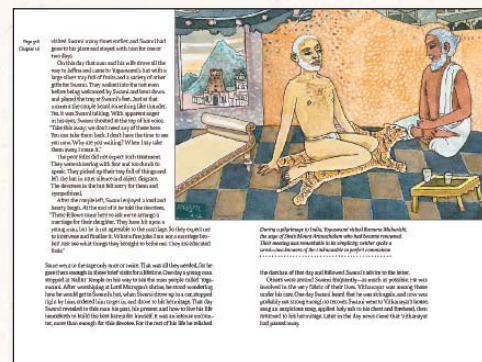
The illustrated stories of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, his guru Siva Yogaswami and five preceding masters, who all held truth in the palm of their hand and inspired slumbering souls to "Know thy Self"

"Just now I completed the reading of the most powerful *Guru Chronicles*. What a rewarding experience! The design, contents and presentation of the most powerful book to awaken, most wonderful to inspire and the most informative to instill constant devotion to the eternal Guru Parampara are indeed superb and praiseworthy." **DR. S.P. SABHARATHNAM, CHENNAI**

"Deeply captivating. The book has a musical magic, a beautifully lyrical story that happens at once in the past and the present, with the promise of an ever-deepening future of awakening for the reader. It brings so vibrantly to life the simple life and deep spiritual culture of India and Sri Lanka. S. Rajam's art adds to the musical quality, as his work is rhythmic and lyrical, too." **GAYATRI RAJAN, CALIFORNIA**



Here is an adventure into the rarely divulged world of spiritual masters, full of extraordinary stories, insights and spiritual encounters. At its heart is the untold life of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, who founded HINDUISM TODAY, his guru Siva Yogaswami and five preceding masters of the spiritual lineage. Illustrated by the South Indian genius, S. Rajam.



FROM THE AGAMAS

## "I Am the Supreme Self"

An elucidation of the sadhaka's inner identification with the Absolute

*The following is a lucid translation from the Sarvajnanottara Agama, chapter 7, verses 1-16, describing the state of ultimate realization.*

IT IS BEYOND THE REACH OF MANTRAS. IT IS BEREFT OF ALL LIMITING factors. It is free from the three attributes (*sattvika*, *rajasa* and *tamasa*). It is not confined to a particular location and time. Free from the colors created by names and forms, It is the knower of all. All-pervasive and reveling in sublime calmness, It has Its active presence in each and every soul, and It is capable of simultaneously seeing and doing everything. It is bereft of the organs and instruments needed for the actions of ordinary beings, for It exists without any support for its presence. It is self-sustaining, extremely subtle, indestructible, ever-existent, incomparable, immeasurable and beyond all validation. The exalted Supreme Self is extolled to be of such transcendental characteristics.

The essential nature of awareness is to become one with the object that is deeply contemplated upon. If the sadhaka meditates continuously on a particular form, he assumes that form in due course. Whichever state of mind is meditated upon, he masters. The nature of being one, the nature of being many and all other such states of mind are reflected in him and his external creation. All the qualities of any form meditated upon become unfolded within him.

By meditating on the Supreme Lord, the sadhaka acquires a power so elevated that it gifts all fruits that may be desired by devotees. He becomes the bestower of all. Though he is one, he is seen in six different perspectives: *bhuta-atma*, *antar-atma*, *tattva-atma*, *jiva-atma*, *mantra-atma* and *Parama-atma*. Thus, the one and the same Self presents itself in many shades.

The bhutatma is the self which remains associated with a physical body, which is resultant of the five principal elements. The same self becomes the tattvatma when it identifies itself with the tattvas that constitute the subtle body. That same self becomes mantratma when it is in oneness with the form of mantra. It is called antaratma when it is associated with the four modes of sound—*para*, *pashyanti*, *madhyama* and *vaikhari*. When it is able to experience pleasure and pain with equality, is able to associate with the three attributes and also perseveres in worldly life, it is called jivatma. The same self becomes Paramatma when it remains freed from all these adjuncts.

The sadhaka who has elevated himself to the supreme state of Paramatma becomes inwardly established in eternity and endowed

with the exalted qualities of Siva. He sees all forms and worlds within himself. The moment he slides down (the spine; the chakras) and holds the notion of duality, he creates for himself the chance of rebirth, even though he has been endowed with such supreme qualities. After birth, he would once again make efforts to elevate himself, such as offering services without expecting any reward and trying to discern the eternal from the transient. When the karmic effects of his previous actions are spent and he again sees pleasure, pain, praise and abuse with equanimity, the guru's grace descends upon him.

When the proper time is reached to dissociate himself from the bondage of the tattvas, the supreme notion of non-duality unfolds

itself. Even though the Supreme Self is only one, it appears to be manifold due to the mind, deluded by the notions of difference. Those who are not trained in the path of yoga and jnana keep themselves under the illusion that they are different from Siva. Being misled by erroneous knowledge, they recite hundreds of names to eulogize the Lord, who is only one and who is nameless.

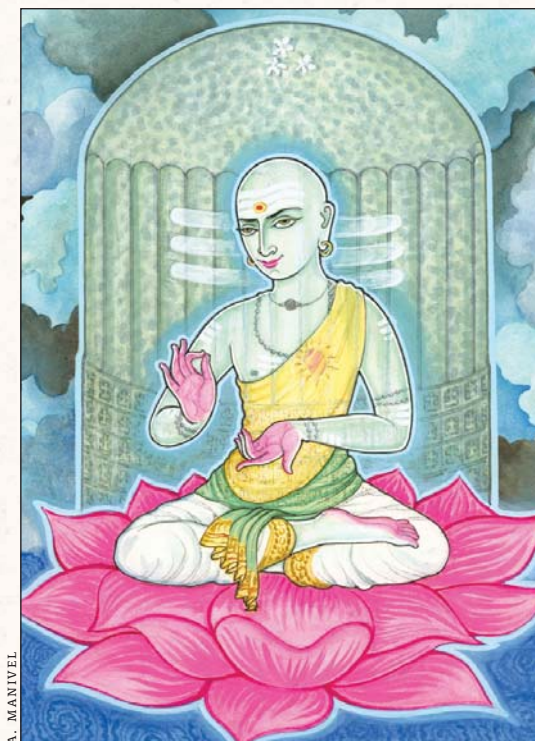
When this highest knowledge dawns in the heart of the sadhaka, he begins to realize the qualities of his own supreme self, which are eternal and changeless.

"I am indeed the Supreme Self. I am the indweller in all forms, Purusha, who is considered to be the source of all manifestations and evolutions. I am the Supreme and Absolute Reality. I am the one to be known by all and by all means. I am imperishable. All things which are perishable emerge only from me as differentiated extensions. I am completely free from the notion of existence and non-existence. I am One. I am Siva. I remain indestructible, even though I am pervading the perishable universe."

Holding such views firmly, the enlightened sadhaka remains completely free from the effects of karmas, annihilated by his yogic disciplines. His

knots of doubts are severed. Being established within his own self and unaffected by modifications of the mind, he contemplates his own eternal Self without interruption. Having dispelled all lingering mental impressions, being with contented heart, free from the three impurities—anava, karma and maya—and being firmly rooted in the unassailable notion of non-duality, the sadhaka should always meditate on his own self in total identity with the Absolute.

DR. S. P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARYAR, of the Adi Saiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and *Shilpa Shastras*. This excerpt is from his recent translation of the *Sarvajnanottara Agama's Vidya Pada*.



**Realizations:** The sadhaka, as pure awareness, becomes one with his object of contemplation



# Exploring the Temples of Java, Indonesia

Among the world's largest Hindu and Buddhist temples, they have survived earthquakes, volcanoes and changes in religious loyalty

**W**ITH ABUNDANT FERTILE LAND YIELDING THREE RICE CROPS a year, Indonesia has historically been an agriculturally prosperous region—as it continues to be. We can get a sense of the great investment in religion the kingdoms of centuries ago made from the Prambanan temple and the Buddhist Borobudur monument, two lavish complexes located just a few kilometers apart in central Java, possibly built by the same king. We omitted these historical sites from last issue's accounts of the Hindus of Java because as they unfortunately no longer figure much in the lives of the island's Hindus. They are today popular tourist destinations and remain a remarkable testament to a past era.



*Tourists explore the central temples of the Prambanan complex dedicated to Lord Siva; (above) Prambanan complex from a distance*



BY RAJIV MALIK,  
JAVA, INDONESIA

**W**E FIND REFERENCES TO JAVA IN HINDU literature as early as 200 bce; the oldest Hindu relic discovered there to date is a first-century-ce statue of Ganesha found on Panaitan Island, off the northwest coast of Java near Jakarta. Throughout the first millennium of our current era, successive Indian kingdoms—the Palavas, Guptas, Palas, Cholas and others—spread Indian culture across Southeast Asia, including what is modern Indonesia.

Hinduism was brought here first by Hindu traders. Buddhism, still strong in India at that time, was brought by pilgrims passing through on their way to and from India, and by Chinese missionaries.

The two religions harmoniously coexisted to the extent that both Hindu and Buddhist temples, including some of the most magnificent on the island, were built by the same Javanese kings. But Java is a seismically active region with numerous volcanoes, with eruptions and frequent earthquakes through the centuries, some of devastating magnitude.

Even immense stone structures do not hold up under such conditions.

By the mid-19th century, shaken apart by earthquakes, the temples were in unfortunate condition. Stones and other materials have also been looted from the structures. And the seismic unrest continues: as recently as 2006, an earthquake caused substantial damage to Prambanan Temple.

Reconstruction programs have been conducted at the most prominent temples, first under the Dutch in the 1930s and then under the government of Indonesia, continuing

to this day. This is no easy task. Essentially the original structures were largely collapsed, with hundreds of stones scattered around the area, some buried beneath the soil. Parts of monuments were below the current ground level, particularly at Borobudur. The government specified that before any shrine could be rebuilt, at least 75 percent of the masonry must be found and identified and their position in the temple schematic determined. Of most smaller shrines, only the foundations are visible.

The results of the restorers' valiant efforts are mixed. They neither possessed the skills of the original builders nor did they try to recreate each temple exactly as it had been.

Aware of their own limitations, they simply tried to piece structures back together as best they could and fill in what was missing.

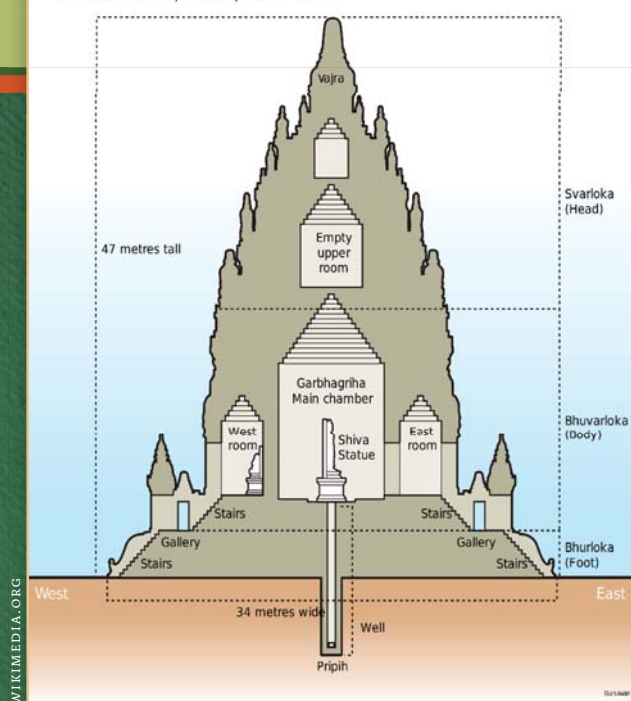
It is understandable, therefore, that most of these structures are no longer active places of worship. In fact, Indonesians refer to them as "dead monuments"—as opposed to the "living monuments" of Bali, the ancient temples there where worship has never ceased. Although puja is performed from time to time in the dead monuments, their primary use is by the tourist trade. Indeed, they are very popular with Indonesians and international travelers alike.

Our April, 2014, tour of Java had two objectives: to meet the local Hindu community,

as reported in the October/November/December, 2014, issue and to explore these old temples, the subject of this report. In particular, we visited several in Central Java, including the largest and best known, Prambanan, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. From there we went to the site called Ratu Boko's Palace—the residence of a king that commands a stunning view of Prambanan Temple. We then visited Ceto, built in the 15th century and quite different from Prambanan. Finally we explored the Dieng Plateau temples, the island's oldest Hindu temple complex, dedicated to the principal figures in the *Mahabharata*. Our report concludes with the 9th-century Borobudur temple,



Shiva Temple Cross Section  
Prambanan Temple Complex, Indonesia



## The Great Temple of Prambanan



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GOOGLE EARTH

(clockwise from above right): Map of Java island showing the four temples covered in this report; aerial shot of Prambanan Temple; repairs underway shortly after the 2006 earthquake; (inset) the partially collapsed central Siva temple around 1895, after its rediscovery by the British; diagram of the main Siva temple; tourists today strolling through the expansive grounds



ONNY CARR





Indonesia's most popular tourist attraction and the largest Buddhist temple in the world.

### Prambanan

"Prambanan," explains archeologist Manggar Sarl Ayuati, "is one of the largest Hindu temple complexes in Asia with an enclosed area 390 meters on a side. It was built in 856 by King Rakai Pikatan of the Sanjaya dynasty, which ruled the Mataram Kingdom, and was expanded by later kings. It is dedicated to Siva."

Prambanan (photos, pages 18–21) has three concentric courtyards. The innermost contains 16 temples, including the 156-foot-high main temple to Siva and 108-foot temples to Vishnu and Brahma. Each is faced by a smaller temple for the God's *vahana* (mount): Nandi the bull for Siva, Hamsa the swan for Brahma and Garuda the eagle (Indonesia's national symbol) for Vishnu. Scenes from the *Ramayana* and the life of Krishna are carved on the outer walls of the temples. The Siva temple has multiple chambers (see drawing, page 20)—Siva in the center, Durga in the north, Rishi Agastya in the south and Ganesha in the west.

The second courtyard originally contained 240 small temples; only 129 have undergone any degree of restoration. The rest are just piles of rocks. No structures remain in the third courtyard, and the historical use of that area is unknown. The complex also contains four Buddhist temples, built by a Hindu king for his Buddhist wife.

Prambanan was abandoned in the 10th century, likely when the Mataram kingdom moved to East Java following a huge eruption of nearby Mount Merapi that covered the entire area in volcanic ash. A major earthquake

in the 16th century collapsed the upper parts of the main structures. The temple sustained additional damage in the 6.5-magnitude earthquake of 2006. Repairs were still underway during our 2014 visit.

I was saddened to hear this spectacular place referred to as a dead monument and to see it reduced to a picnic spot for tourists. Puja is performed here only once a year, but that brings thousands of people from all over Indonesia to worship Siva, Brahma and Vishnu. With some difficulty, puja can be arranged at other times of the year. Our guide, Pak Dewa Suratnaya, a journalist with *Media Hindu* magazine, said strongly that these great temples should be brought to life again through regular worship. I agreed with him wholeheartedly.

### Ratu Boko

Two miles away, commanding a spectacular view of Prambanan, lies Ratu Boko's Palace. This forty-acre complex of buildings and fortifications was likely built by the same kings who built Prambanan. An inscription found in the ruins during restoration has been dated to 792 ce.

One enters Ratu Boko through a grand staircase (photo below), beyond which are pavilions, audience halls, three miniature temples, what is believed to be a crematorium, a terrace with multiple pools of water and at least two major artificial caves, apparently built for meditation. A gold plate found here carries the inscription "Om Rudraya namah swaha," a prayer to Siva in His Rudra form. There is also evidence here of Buddhist worship. A good three-part video on Ratu Boko can be viewed at [bit.ly/RatuBoku](http://bit.ly/RatuBoku).

### Candi Ceto

This 15th-century Siva temple is located on the western slope of Mount Lawu at an elevation of about 3,000 feet, on the border between central and east Java. The 62-mile drive from our hotel in Klaten took us over three hours.

One of several temples in this area, Candi Ceto is among the last built by the Hindu kings. In appearance it is much different from Prambanan. By this time, six centuries after the construction of Prambanan, the Javanese Hindus had developed an architectural style that diverged from the traditional Indian design and motifs found in the earlier temples. Furthermore, when Ceto was renovated in 1975–76, some "reconstructions" were made that were not justified archeologically and were not part of the original structures. An example is the several tall split or winged gates. Although these are a defining element of Balinese temples today, there is no evidence that they were a part of the original architecture of Candi Ceto. But even if not historically authentic, the gates provide a soul-stirring impact (photo, page 22).

A signboard posted at the site tells us that the temple has 13 terraces from its base to its peak, reminiscent of the prehistoric Javanese structures. At the entrance is a large stylized stone turtle (photo, page 22); other animals are depicted throughout the area. The various statues found here appear to represent humans rather than Gods.

Candi Ceto has its own worship schedule. Puja is performed every fifth day by 50 devotees and priests. A special ceremony is held every seventh five-day cycle, called Angora Kasi on the Javanese calendar. Because of

## Ceto Temple



## Ratu Boko

(counterclockwise from upper left) Approaching the 15th-century Candi Ceto, likely the last Hindu temple built before the local rulers adopted Islam; at the foot of the temple's 13 terraces; looking back through the split gates (though a common feature of present-day Balinese temples, their "reconstruction" here has been challenged as without scientific basis); grand entrance to the 40-acre palace of Ratu Boko overlooking Prambanan temple complex.







The ancient Arjuna temple complex contains shrines not only to the Pandavas and their wives, but to other figures in the epic Mahabharata



Arjuna

Semar, ancestor and guardian spirit of the Javanese people

Srikandi (Sikhandi), a key figure in the Mahabharata

Puntadewa (Yudhisthira), Arjuna's eldest brother

Sambadra (Subhadra), Arjuna's wife, mother of Abhimanyu

the active worship, this remains a spiritually charged place; but it is also a popular tourist destination. Many people were here simply to enjoy the cool, pleasant weather and beautiful scenery.

#### Dieng Complex

We stopped to explore the Dieng Plateau of north central Java on our way to the Semarang airport, but one of the island's frequent rainstorms descended upon us and we quickly resumed our journey. This is the oldest set of temples in Java, dating to the seventh century and likely among the first built with Indian design and technology. Today the temples are named after principal characters in the *Mahabharata*, but little is

known about their original purpose nor the king who built them.

Archeologists believe the designs to be in the Dravidian and Pallava style of South India. They are grouped in irregular clusters, named today as Arjuna, Gatotkaca and Dwarawati. The original site may have included as many as 400 temples, of which only eight remain standing. When they first came to the attention of a British soldier in 1814, they were in the middle of a lake. The Dutch East Indies government undertook their restoration in the mid-nineteenth century.

Compared to Prambanan, built just a short time later, everything here is relatively small, lacking in ornamentation and neither uniform in design nor

organized in the elaborate, concentric mandalas of later temples. It is believed that increased volcanic activity led to their abandonment in the 10th century, around the same time as Prambanan.

#### Lontar

One other form of ancient monument, if you will, is found here in Java: the palm-leaf manuscripts known as *lontar*. Written in Sanskrit and Old Javanese, these are clearly sourced in South India's and Nepal's *Saiva Agamas*, among other scriptures. While hundreds of *lontar* are known to scholars—many in the library of Leiden University in Holland, as

well as in libraries in Bali and Jakarta—readers may recall from the previous article that priests I met refused to even show me the *lontar* in their possession, considering them sacred and secret. Many other *lontar* are believed to have been lost when the Majapahit kingdom fell in the 15th century and Hindus fled to Bali.

According to scholar Andrea Acri, "These are practical manuals, intended as guides for initiates. They deal with the Saiva concepts of salvation, cosmology, micro/macrocosmic classifications, yoga, mantras, Absolute Reality and the various aspects of Siva." One known source of the *lontar* is the *Kirana Agama*.

A heretofore unknown commentary on

Patajali's *Yoga Sutras* called *Dharma Patanjala* has also been discovered in Java. This is different than the well-known *Yogabhasya* attributed to Vyaasa.

The first and second shloka of *Dharma Patanjala*, as translated by Acri, reads, "The Lord—unfathomable, formless, appeased, constant, immutable—that is Siva, subtle, supreme, appeased, with form as well as formless. What is called the cessation of the functions of the mind is the yoga, extremely difficult to achieve. Having undertaken that yoga, the soul itself alone shines forth."

This rare esoteric work shows that not only our faith and ways of worship came to Java, but the deepest and most mystical of Hindu teachings as well.

#### Conclusion

As an Indian, I was startled to find all these distinctly Indian-style temples built so long ago in this far-off land. These Hindu kingdoms were not established by conquest and did not involve one racial group ruling over another; these were ethnic Javanese kings, ancestors of the people who still reside here. Through the kings' interchanges with India, Hinduism and Buddhism were imported wholesale, complete with their mysticism, yoga, scriptures, rituals and architecture. Only now, in the 21st century, are we again seeing a similar exportation of Hinduism from Mother India, with huge and elaborate temples being established in distant lands.

## Candi Dieng: Java's Oldest Temples



(left to right) Lord Vishnu with His chakra is on the north outside wall of the Srikandi temples, Siva is on the east and Brahma on the south; the Bhima temple, located outside the Arjuna complex, is the best preserved of all the Dieng temples; Gatotkaca temple during restoration and protection work—Gatotkaca, son of Bhima and Hidimbi is known in Java by a nickname which translates to "muscle wire; bones iron"





# Borobudur Buddhist Temple

The largest Buddhist temple in the world and Indonesia’s top tourist attraction, built near the Prambanan and at about the same time



**B**OROBUDUR IS AN IMPOSING STRUCTURE MEASURING 403.5 FEET on a side with the central stupa reaching 115 feet. Completed in 825 ce under the Hindu kings of the region, it is a monument to the prevailing religious harmony of the time. For Buddhists it is a place of worship. Pilgrims take a path around the temple and then up the temple’s three main levels, which correspond in Buddhist cosmology to the world of desire (Kāmadhātu), the world of forms (Rupadhātu) and the world of formlessness (Arupadhātu). The top levels feature 72 Buddha statues, each meditating inside a stone latticework stupa.

The pilgrims’ route is lined with thousands of narrative and decorative relief panels depicting the principles of Buddhist religion and life, along with scenes of contemporary Javanese life. An 8th-century ship shown on one panel (at right) inspired a replica, which successfully sailed from Indonesia to Africa in 2004. Other panels portray the life of Buddha, the Jataka tales and the story of the Indian youth Sudhana in his search for wisdom—an account popular in China.

It is estimated the construction took 75 years, during the time Prambanan and other Hindu and Buddhist temples were built in the

same area. A total of 72,000 cubic yards of stone were quarried nearby, carved and fitted together on site without mortar. The complex was built following the rules of *Vastu Shastra*, using the technology of the Indian stone-carving tradition.

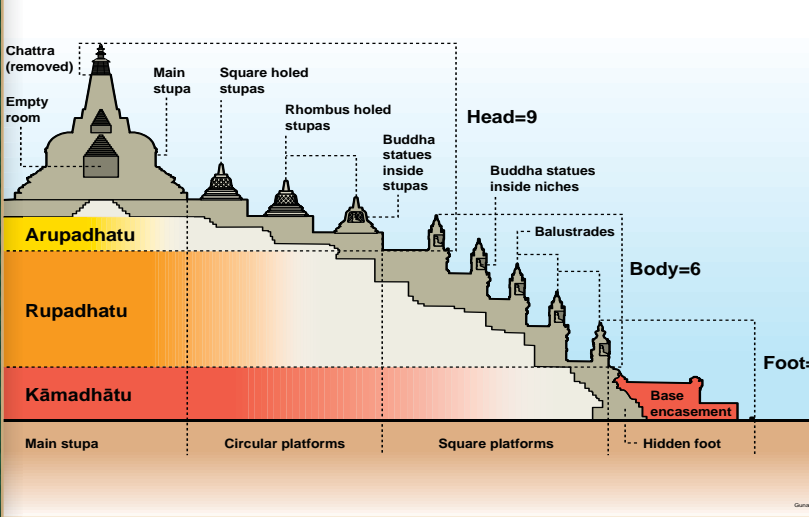
The temple was abandoned at about the same time as Prambanan, when a series of volcanic eruptions buried the area in ash. In 1814, partly crumbling, it was “discovered”—as the British liked to say—and unearthed when the local people told Java’s British governor of its existence. Later Dutch administrations set out to preserve and restore the massive edifice. In a complete overhaul by the Indonesian government and UNESCO between 1975 and 1982, over a million stones were removed, cleaned and the structure reassembled as we see it today—a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

.....

(clockwise from above) Looking up at the monument from its base; (inset) one of the meditating Buddhas encased in a latticed stone stupa on the monument’s top level, that of enlightenment; aerial view; Buddha in a partially disassembled stupa; temple design; an 8th-century ocean-going Javanese ship with outriggers



**Borobudur Cross Section and Building Ratio**  
Borobudur, Central Java, Indonesia







PHOTOS COURTESY BAPS SWAMINARAYAN SANSTHA

## TEMPLES

# Fully Enclosed Ornate Marble Temple Opens in New Jersey

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Robbinsville is the latest phase in what will become the Western world's largest Hindu temple complex

**L**AST AUGUST SAW THE INAUGURATION of the first of two new temples being opened by the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) in rural Robbinsville, New Jersey. Amid weeks of festivities, an all-marble mandir was ritually consecrated by His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the organization's spiritual head.

This mandir is unique among the many temples BAPS has built around the world in recent decades: the entire Nagara-style structure—87 feet wide, 133 feet long and 42 feet high, including domes and *shikhars*—is enclosed within a modern building to protect the ornately carved, soft Italian Carrara marble from the harsh northeastern winters. Without such protection, the structure would disintegrate long before the 1,000-year lifespan specified by the guru.

The temple was designed according to the *Shilpa Shastras* by architect Prakashbhai Sompura, three BAPS sadhus and several others. Its construction took just over three years. Along with the connected sant ashram, it represents Phase Two in the development of a 167-acre property which will become BAPS' North American headquarters. Phase One included a satsang activity center, assembly hall, kitchen, dining areas, gymnasium and classrooms. Phase Three will be a dedicated youth center, and Phase Four is to be a welcome center for visitors.

Phase Five of the project will see the completion of the second, larger temple, Akshardham Mahamandir, as envisioned by the guru in 1997. This massive edifice of Bulgarian limestone and Greek marble is currently being carved 8,000 miles away in Rajasthan, as was the marble for the temple just opened.

It is expected to be complete, with accompanying circumambulatory path, ornate gardens and exhibition halls, within seven to eight years. It will be a pilgrimage destination for devotees of Bhagwan Swaminarayan near and far and a spiritual, educational and cultural center for the broader community.

The powerful *murti pratishtha* (ceremony to make a statue into a murti) was transformed into an even more special occasion for devotees who had the rare opportunity to be with their beloved Swamishri—as Pramukh Swami Maharaj is affectionately known—on American soil. Defying assumptions that at 93 he had reached an age and frailty prohibitive of long-distance travel, Swamishri resolved in the weeks before the festival to board a specially chartered flight to Newark and inaugurate the temple himself. News spread quickly, along with shock

and delight, and devotees from around the globe made last-minute pilgrimage plans to join him, so many as to cause a spike in Delhi-New Jersey/New York fares.

Over 20,000 visitors (including two of our editors) arrived to participate in this historic event. Parking lots quickly exceeded capacity, and fallow soy fields were flattened to accommodate thousands more cars and buses. The indefatigable Swamishri gave darshan the very night of his arrival and every day of the elaborate festivities, often coming out in the midday sun to bless excited crowds who packed the acres surrounding a giant stage.

It is Hindu tradition that many blessings are available through participating in the consecration of a temple. In one special activity, 17,566 devotees participated in six *yajna* (fire ceremony) sessions held over four days for world peace and family harmony. There were 231 *yajna* kunds (individual fire altars) in an 80,000-square-foot, 40-foot-high tent. In addition, the murtis were paraded around the complex's circular road, along with Pramukh Swami Maharaj's personal Harikrishna murti, which he worships daily. The murti rode in an orange Lamborghini loaned for the parade. (Visit [bit.ly/BAPS-Robbinsville](http://bit.ly/BAPS-Robbinsville) for full coverage of the event.)

### Official Welcome

New Jersey Congressman Frank Pallone was effusive in his praise when he addressed the assembly following the first half of the murti pratishtha ceremonies on August 9: "I don't think I've ever seen such carvings and such magnificence in any religious facility anywhere. I think it is a testimony to all of you, to the Indian community and to the Hindu community that you have built this facility. It preaches tolerance for other religions, it preaches peace and nonviolence... It will not only be a place where all of you

can come and meditate, contemplate and think about God and what you can do for your community spiritually, but I think it also will provide an opportunity for those who are not Indian or not Hindu to see what Hinduism is all about, and appreciate the beauty and spirituality of it."

Maryland Congressman Steny Hoyer addressed the crowd on the following day: "This mandir will surely not only be a place of worship, but also of service; it will be a place where the saying 'in the joy of others lies our own' is translated from words into actions, as followers of this movement have done throughout the world for the benefit of millions and millions of people.... It will bring some of the vibrancy, diversity and spiritual richness of India to the northeastern United States to the benefit of all of us."



### The Project

Hundreds of BAPS volunteers from nearby and around the world, inspired by their guru, offered a complete array of services—from design and engineering in India to stone selection in Italy, from carving coordination to shipping in Rajasthan, from site preparation to supporting the stone artisans at the construction site, from lighting and electrical

**The mandir within:** (clockwise from far left) Pramukh Swami Maharaj (in chair) personally performs the consecration rituals, investing the marble statue of Bhagwan Swaminarayan with divine prana, thus transforming it into a living murti; hundreds of volunteers help clean every nook and cranny of the ornately carved marble in the weeks approaching the festival; a family participates in a *yajna*; Swamishri in front of the finished masterpiece, complete with a sky-lit outer building to protect it from the weather

wiring to polishing and cleaning the assembled marble, from sweeping paths to building tents and stages, from cooking meals to caring for the medical needs of thousands of visitors at the mandir's inauguration.

HINDUISM TODAY interviewed several of the sadhus in charge of BAPS activities in North America to understand the trends and impacts of temple building, membership growth and youth development in recent years.

### On Temple Building

Yagnavallabh Swami, head of satsang activities: "Today BAPS has 90 mandirs in North America, including six large stone-carved *shikharbaddh* mandirs. [It has more than 1,100 mandirs worldwide, including 34 in the *shikharbaddh* style.] The mandir is primarily the home of God,

where we come to have darshan, offer our devotion and pray. It offers spiritual education, where the wisdom of our scriptures and sages is conveyed in an accessible manner on a weekly basis. It also offers service opportunities, and devotees offer their time, energy, intelligence and resources to serve God, guru and society in a variety of ways. The only large-scale mandir being constructed



## Akshardham Mahamandir Robbinsville, New Jersey



**Grand plan:** Architectural 3D rendering of the future Akshardham Mahamandir—233 feet wide, 318 feet long and 144 feet tall, its 5.5-acre environs defined by a parikrama path covered by a formal red stone structure; (inset) from across a giant pond, a view of the modern building that encloses the smaller mandir located in front and to the side of the Mahamandir inaugurated in August of 2014

### On Engaging the Youth

*Amrutnandan Swami, head of children's and youth activities:* "In 1995 we had approximately 40 weekly children and youth forums for different age groups in North America. Today we have 400. In 1996 our national youth convention attracted only 350 youth; in 2013, 8,200 attendees participated in national conventions for children, youth and young adults. The growth in numbers reflects the growing interest of children and youth to engage with their spiritual heritage and in service beyond themselves.

"Together with growth in scale, there has been continued development in the quality of these programs, with well-organized activities that cater to the children's and youths' overall development—spiritually, intellectually, socially, emotionally and physically.

"The seeds of this growth in scale, scope and leadership of children and youth were planted 40 years ago when Swamishri first traveled the length and breadth of North America, personally reaching out to youth and inspiring them to live a spiritual and devotional life. Over his next 15 visits he showered love on them, nurturing a dedicated core of young people who manifested the principles of spirituality in their own lives and became the young leaders we have today."

### On Translating the Faith to America

*Mangalnidhi Swami, head of publications:* "The expressions of faith are globally consistent, for the most part. The bhakti elements (arati, puja, kirtans, scriptural reading, etc.) are uniform. But the transmission of knowledge (katha, scriptural reading, etc.) can encounter a language barrier. Conveying concepts in English that were originally in an Indic language requires extra effort. Sometimes in the presentation of these concepts, people from a Western background are naturally more comfortable using presentation formats that are in vogue in the Western world (TED talk presentation, etc.), but the message stays the same. Fortunately, India is quick to adopt new styles of presentation."

### Conclusion

When complete, the Robbinsville project will be by far the largest Hindu temple complex in not only the US, but all of the Western world including Europe. It is a part of an outburst of temple building activity not seen since the days of the great Hindu kingdoms of India—let alone by a single spiritual organization. It is all a reflection of the intent of BAPS' leader, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, to not only bring the fullness of Hinduism to the West, but to nurture and empower the Hindu youth to hold fast to the Sanatana Dharma despite their immersion in Western culture.

now is Akshardham in Robbinsville. Five or six smaller Hari mandirs are also being completed. New mandirs will be planned based on the need of each local community."

### On the Two Types of Mandirs

*Chaitanyamurti Swami, head of outreach activities:* "BAPS builds two types of mandirs: shikharbaddh mandirs and the smaller Hari mandirs. The former are traditional stone mandirs that have been built exactly according to scriptural standards. Hari mandirs utilize modern building materials and styles.

"In a shikharbaddh mandir, arati must be performed five times a day, thus allowing worshipers more opportunities for darshan. Hari mandirs offer only one arati in the morning and one in the evening.

"The campus of a larger mandir offers auxiliary facilities for a wide variety of activities. A spacious assembly hall allows larger spiritual gatherings. Greater classroom space enables more youth to learn basic Hindu concepts. Gymnasiums encourage teens to engage in sports. The beautiful structures and positive Hindu peer group enhance the

youths' sense of pride, inspiring them to learn more about their religion and introduce it to their non-Hindu friends.

"A large, stone-carved mandir subtly creates an environment of grandeur befitting a home of God and helps keep us humble in the vastness of His greatness and glory. The scriptures mention that when speaking of God's greatness, all we can say is "Neti neti" (not this, not this). The larger traditional mandirs help create this sense of awe when approaching God for worship."

### On the Mission of Akshardham

*Aksharvatsal Swami, member of the design team:* "For Hindus young and old, Akshardham will be a place to celebrate traditions, foster faith and inspire a spiritual lifestyle full of peace and happiness. For those unfamiliar with the Hindu faith, Akshardham will serve as an educative introduction. By expressing our shared values and a message of universal peace, Akshardham will foster harmony and respect among all faiths and communities."

### On Membership and Satsang

*Yagnavallabh Swami:* "Following the advice of Swamishri, many families are doing ghar sabha, where the entire family gather in front of the home shrine to sing kirtans, listen to scriptural readings and explanations, and communicate about family matters. Daily ghar sabha enhances family unity and openness, providing a forum to communicate within a spiritual atmosphere, thus counteracting the outward pull of mobile devices, the Internet and social networks."





ALL PHOTOS BY THOMAS KELLY

## OBSERVANCES

# Nepal's Dynamic Indra Festival

Hindus and Buddhists join together in a 400-year-old celebration that invokes divine blessings through giant Deities and a sanctified little girl

BY SALLY ACHARYA, NEPAL

IN NEPAL'S KATHMANDU VALLEY, THE beliefs and practices of Hinduism and Buddhism weave together like the intertwined scrollwork on Kathmandu's elaborate temples. A perfect manifestation of this harmony is Indra Jatra, one of Nepal's most iconic festivals.

Like much of Kathmandu's ritual and artistic culture, this festival originates with the city's ethnic Newar community. Statistically, the Newars are 85 percent Hindu and 15 percent Buddhist. But their practice and belief are inclusive; and they share the celebration of the many forms of Divinity.

The Indra Jatra is said to date back over 1,200 years to the eighth century. The traditions behind it are distinctly Hindu. The eight-day *jatra* (festival) is dedicated to Indra, the Rain God, as an offering of thanks for the monsoon and the coming harvest. As masked dancers whirl to drums and cymbals, chariots carrying *murtis* (physical images) of two Hindu Gods—Ganesha and the fierce Bhairav manifestation of Siva—are hauled by human muscle through the streets. The crowning moment is when the Kumari,

Kathmandu's "living Goddess," who is said to embody a form of Durga, makes one of her rare public appearances in an immense chariot of her own.

So far, it sounds Hindu. But inside the chariots the Deities are embodied by Buddhist children. Two boys are chosen as Bhairav and Ganesha, while a Buddhist girl is selected at around the age of four as Kathmandu's famous Kumari, residing until adolescence in a temple-palace on Durbar Square. There she is worshiped daily and, on Indra Jatra, places *tika* (forehead mark) on the head of state, who until recently was a Hindu king, to legitimize his rule for one more year.

A colorful tale explains the festival's origins. Indra Himself, the legend goes, came to Kathmandu in search of a jasmine flower (*parijat*) for his mother, Bashundara, who needed it for a ritual. As he plucked it near Durbar Square, the locals mistook him for a thief and placed him to prison. His distraught mother soon came in search of him, as did his trusty elephant. When the people realized whom they had captured, they sheepishly released the God. The festival winds through the city in a re-enactment

of the search by Indra's mother, played by a masked dancer, and by Indra's elephant, created out of wicker.

The original effort to praise (and perhaps apologize to) Indra grew and expanded over the centuries. It now includes worship of Bhairav to bring luck and protection for the coming year. By the mid-1700s, the festival had merged with the ritual blessing of the king for the coming year by the Kumari.

The origins of the Kumari ritual are not precisely known. One former Kumari, Rashmila Shakya, favors the theory that there was once a small girl who behaved rudely to the king, claiming to be a Goddess. When he arrogantly banished her and her family, the queen became ill. Realizing his mistake, the king called her back and recognized her as an emanation of Taleju, a local form of Durga. In another version, the Goddess used to appear in Her divine form to the king, but he insulted her by making a pass at her. She later agreed to come back, but only in the form of a young virgin.

Which king first began the ceremonial Kumari worship and in which time period? The proposed dates range from as early as 1615 to



**Invoking divine powers:** (clockwise from opposite page) Indra's elephant dances through the streets in search of his master; Nepal's Kumari makes an appearance to bless the head of state; giant pole representing Indra, placed to preside over the festival in Kathmandu's main square; Swet-Bhairav, usually concealed behind a grille at an open-air shrine, is revealed only once a year, when devotees worship Him and some take rice liquor *prasad* from the pipe in His mouth

as late as 1768. The latter date, though, seems unlikely, being barely a dozen years before the conquest of Kathmandu by Prithvi Narayan Shah. By that time, belief in the importance of the Kumari's blessing of the head of state was so solidly entrenched among the people that the Shah timed his invasion to coincide with the wild festivities of Indra Jatra—and made a special point of receiving *tika* from the Kumari before the king of Kathmandu could bow to her. In effect, he won the war by receiving the blessings of the Goddess.

Kumari worship has long demonstrated the mingling of Newar Hinduism and Buddhism. As Rashmila Shakya, the former Kumari, put in her 2005 autobiography, *From Goddess to Mortal*: "Some of us are Buddhist and some are Hindu, and we are tolerant enough that I was to become the most prominent symbol of this tolerance."

The interweaving of the two faiths is vast and complex. Not only the Kumari but other Deities as well are regarded in different but complementary ways, according to Badra Ratna Bajracharya, dean of Lumbini Bud-



dhist University. Bhairav, for instance, is worshiped by Buddhists as Mahakala. To Hindus that is one of the many names of Siva; to Buddhists Mahakala is a Boddhisatva whose fierce appearance expresses His role as a protector of the dharma. In other examples, the Hindu Deity Pashupatinath is also worshiped as Buddha—and Buddhist courtyards may contain a Krishna statue. Many local Deities are worshiped by both groups under different names. Local festivals, as well, typically have different but connected meanings to the two communities.

Each year, as the monsoon passes and the fields begin to sparkle, Kathmandu comes together to celebrate that shared heritage. Ask a person on the street during Indra Jatra which community the festival is for, and they'll make no distinction. "It's Hindu," they'll say. "But it's also Buddhist. It's mixed. God is one, so it's for everyone."

SALLY ACHARYA is a journalist who has written for the Washington Post, USA Today and other publications. She lives in Kathmandu, Nepal, where she is working on a book.



# Mother, Father, Guru, God

Hindu dharma is fulfilled when we find and hold a spiritual preceptor in our hearts and lives, then strive to be the spiritual being he would have us be

BY DR. VATSALA SPERLING

HINDU RISHIS SPEAK OF THE FOUR POWERS that guide our lives—*mata, pita, guru, daivam* (mother, father, teacher and God). Parents give us our physical body and bring us to a guru who might enable our spiritual birth and help us realize God. In India, we are taught to love and honor these four beings. I was ok with honoring my parents and Gods but did not like a guru in this list. I said to my mother, "I love you. I don't need anyone else." As a five year old, I was content in my mother's blissful company.

From this childhood, an event stands out. One evening my father took me to a house with a colorful mandala in front. The air was thick with incense. He left me to greet someone. I stood by myself, aware of a majestic person on a chair. I watched the golden rays of the setting sun casting a warm glow on his orange robes and brilliant eyes. He smiled warmly. I smiled back. For a moment, I stood still, gazing on this person. My father and I prostrated before him—Swamiji Bhoomananda Tirtha. When I stood up facing Swamiji, he was looking calmly into my eyes. I felt happy and safe, as if I was with my mother. I felt a connection that, as a five year old, I could not describe in words. I was unaware that this connection would be felt throughout my life. I later saw people asking Swamiji questions. No questions came to my mind. I was busy feeling happy.

I returned home and asked my mother, "Why do I need a guru? Why were people asking him so many questions? Why no questions came to my mind?" Mother answered patiently, "When it is your turn, questions will come. Meanwhile, remember, a guru is a wise person who can be both a mother and a father to you when you seek his guidance. That is why God made a guru. Your guru can be a rock solid support and offer unconditional love when life throws challenges at you..."

In subsequent years, I did not think about a guru or stay in touch with Swamiji. I was determined to get a great education and succeed as a clinical microbiologist, but when I failed to get into a school of my choice, my dreams crashed. I wrote a letter to Swamiji from my heart. Without expecting a reply from him, I entered another school. When I was home for holidays, my father showed me a journal, *Vi-charasethu*, from Swamiji's ashram that had published my letter and Swamiji's reply. Swamiji's words gave me a fresh insight into what was happening "now" and helped me stop crying about the past. I felt a renewed purpose and hope.

Years later, I encountered a very abusive professor. When I protested, I was asked to leave. I was now at a crossroad with a destination but no clue how to get there. My path was shrouded in a thick, dark fog. Though I had not seen Swamiji for years, I wrote to him about



my predicament as if he would know how it felt to be in such darkness and how to get out.

Days went by. No reply came. I remained hungry because I did not have money to feed myself and pay bills. Eviction notices were pinned to the door. Friendless and penniless, I wondered if I should drop out of school and return home, but my hometown did not offer comparable educational opportunities. I must hang on, find a way and eventually become a clinical microbiologist.

One morning, someone telephoned and gave me an appointment to meet Swamiji. Though I was meeting Swamiji after several years, he inquired after my parents and siblings by their name. He asked about my problem and what I wanted to do with my life. Then he asked how much money I needed to comfortably live for a couple of months, pay my bills and feed myself. I told him the amount. After a while, Swamiji gave

me an envelope. I looked inside and saw the amount I had mentioned. This unconditional gift was given to me at a time when I was completely down on my luck. That gift made sure that I could tide over the dark times. Five years later, I earned a PhD in clinical microbiology from one of India's most prestigious university medical schools, and went on to lead the department of clinical microbiology in a children's hospital and do research with the World Health Organization. Later I visited Swamiji's ashram with my mother to thank him for his help, but he was not interested in a "thank you." He wanted to hear about my work in the hospital, my research projects and publications—without thinking for a moment that but for his help, none of this could be happening.

I told my mother that I see Swamiji as my mentor. I wondered why he had chosen to help me stay on my path. My mother said, "A true guru can recognize that there are many different paths for people to realize their full potential. He does not force anything, understands the larger scheme of things and allows people to continue on their path and carry out their dharma. He does not expect anything back. He gives selflessly. His dharma is to help the spiritual birth of an individual. That is why our scriptures have asked us to honor our guru. *Spiritual* means that we discharge our duties and dharma with an attitude of dedication and surrender to guru and God. If we do our duties with a clean and devoted heart, that is a form of worship. Spiritual growth is the natural outcome of this form of service. A guru would love to see his disciples live their life truthfully as if it is a form of worship in action. Swamiji has been one such guru for you." She wished that all of us should be so lucky to have such a true guru.

Twenty years went by. I reinvented myself as a mother, author, knitter and a homeopath in the USA. I wrote Swamiji often, thought of him daily but had not seen him in person. One day, I got an email



BHARAT GOVINDANI

**Having a family guru:** (top row, left to right) Maa Guruprya, Swamiji Bhoomananda Tirtha, Swamiji Nirvisheshananda; (seated) Ehud Sperling, son Mahar and author Vatsala

about a forthcoming visit by Swamiji to the US. My husband, Ehud, having heard about Swamiji's role in my life's major struggles, made sure we would visit him.

This reunion after twenty years became a tearful affair for me. We did a namaskar and sat before Swamiji and his successors. I could do nothing but cry. Sensing my son Mahar's awkwardness in the company of three saints, Swamiji stood up facing Mahar and asked him about his school, hobbies, studies and what he wanted to do with his life. Then he said to him, "Relax. It is different, but you will encounter many different things in life. Don't worry, be happy." He thumped Mahar hard on his chest—just as a friend would do. Swamiji asked Ehud about his publishing work and mentioned that having read our book, *For Seven Lifetimes* (which describes how we arranged our own marriage,) he felt as if he had known Ehud all along and their paths had crossed before on the cosmic highway. Swamiji asked Ehud, "How is the marriage?" Ehud said, "Fantastic." Swamiji was delighted with this answer but he also wanted to know from me how this cross-cultural, inter-religious marriage was working. He knew that by conducting an arranged marriage with Ehud, I had acted exactly according to the culture and tradition of India. Ehud had assured that I could keep up with my Hindu faith in my new home. When I had calmed down and stopped crying, Swamiji asked, "Are you happy? Do you have friends? Do you enjoy your work as a homeopath? Do you get along with your in-laws? Tell me, what have you done of merit?" Instinctively, I pointed to Mahar, and by doing so, I meant, "I am continuing to do my duties as a grihasthin—as a service to my guru and God."

Swamiji blessed me, with so much love and warmth, that I felt in my heart as if I was meeting my beloved mother. I did not feel that I was conversing with one of the greatest contemporary Vedantins,

a linguist, author, scholar and a saint, a spiritual teacher who had renounced the world in the prime of his youth, and for almost sixty years had dedicated all his energy to the service and promotion of the spiritual way of life. He sounded more like a protective parent who is concerned about the well-being of his child. I felt surrounded by a permanent, warm ocean of parental love. I simply needed to reach out and tap into this endless source. In the stillness of my mind, I could hear my mother's voice, "a guru can be both a mother a father to you when you seek his wisdom for your spiritual growth..."

On reviewing the years of my occasional contacts with Swamiji, beginning at age five, I realized that he provided unconditional love though I had never really become his disciple. He extended his support to me irrespective of my path. He allowed me the space to be myself, blossom into an individual that I was meant to be, discharge my duties and realize my potentials while following my dharma. Swamiji expected nothing in return. Swamiji's complete selflessness reminded me of the sun that shines, because his intrinsic nature and dharma is to give light and warmth for sustaining life. By adhering to his dharma of giving selfless love, Swamiji has secured his place in the verse "mata, pita, guru, daivam" and honored the sacred tradition of India that recommends a quest for a guru.

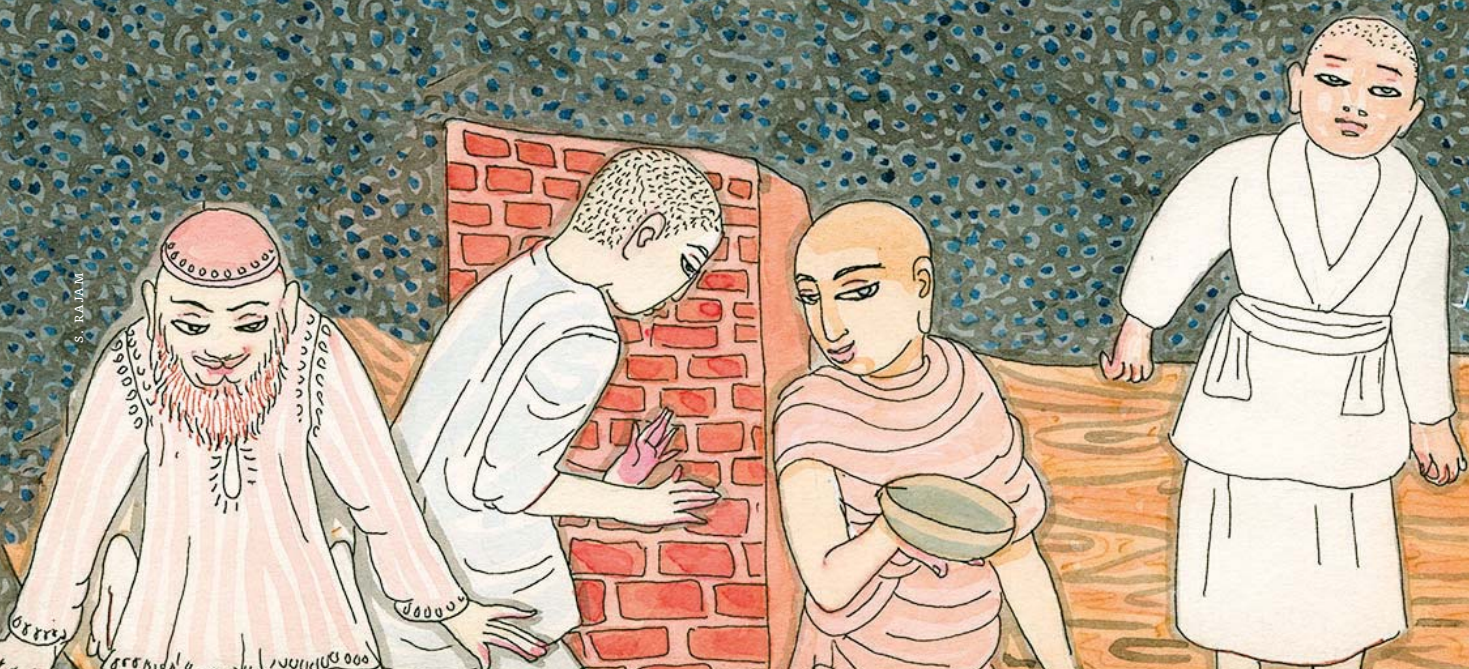
All of us are meant to walk our path and fulfill our dharma. We will invariably encounter unforeseen challenges when we can get confused, lose sight of our path, dharma and destination. Our guru can help us tide over the hard times and regain our clarity so that we can carry out our dharma, live the life that we are meant to live, realize our full potential, and undergo the spiritual growth that we are born to experience. To such a guru, with gratitude, I say, "Guru Brahma, Guru Vishnu, Guru devo Maheshwara—Guru is Brahma, Guru is Vishnu and Guru is the Great Lord Siva."

Visit: [www.narayanashramatapovanam.org](http://www.narayanashramatapovanam.org)

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# How the Major Religions View God, Soul & World



## Nine Core Beliefs of Twelve World Religions And Three Revealing Comparisons

**Introduction by Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**

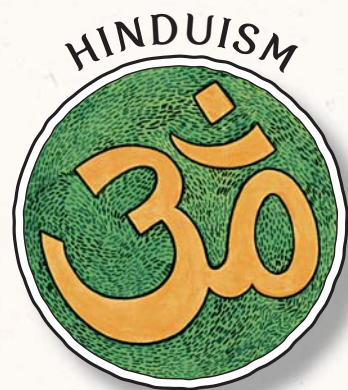
**O**UR BELIEFS DETERMINE OUR THOUGHTS and attitudes about life, which in turn decree our actions. By our actions, we create our destiny. Beliefs about sacred matters—God, soul and cosmos—are essential to one's approach to life. As you will see from a perusal of this Educational Insight, the beliefs among the world's faiths are in many cases quite different from one another, a fact that belies the common Hindu's conception that all religions are one. Distilling a religion down to nine

core beliefs provides a clear window into the essential perspectives within it. Once those perspectives are known, comparisons can be made between religions, making similarities and differences readily apparent. Here we provide three such comparisons: Eastern and Western; Hindu and Christian; and the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This knowledge is useful in many ways. For example, nowadays in any country of the world, many of your friends and coworkers may be of other faiths. Understand-

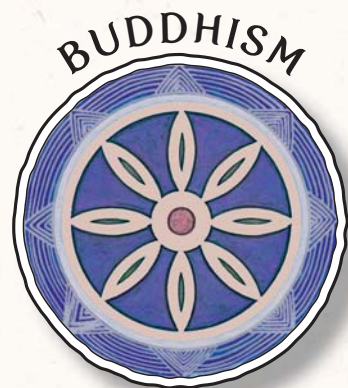
ing how their religions are similar and different from yours helps in preserving harmonious relationships and forming closer ties. It can also inform you about the whys and wherefores of the actions and reactions of other faith members. Some religions declare theirs the one true path, creating a pervasive and persistent antagonism toward those of other persuasions. This may manifest as exclusionism and fanaticism or as an attempt, whether tactical or unintentional, to convert others to their way of thinking. Bolstered with the knowledge of these underlying beliefs and attitudes, one can associate in an informed and sensitive manner. When approached by Christian evangelists, for example, one may, as my guru advised, present a copy of the Hindu/Christian comparison from this Insight, saying, "I appreciate your overtures, but I am firm in my Hindu faith. Here is a document showing what we

believe in comparison to the Christian point of view." When this point-counterpoint was first published in *Christianity Today*, our editorial offices received dozens of letters in which Christians said they had never truly understood the Hindu view of God and soul and world, confiding that the Hindu perceptions were more in harmony with their personal spirituality than the official doctrines of their church. Hindus may find this is more and more common as the world comes to know about the Sanatana Dharma. While there are hundreds of books addressing deeper matters of religious theology and history, none we know of have attempted such concise synopses and side-by-side comparative summaries. Religions are engaging more with one another than ever before in history, creating a greater need for mutual discovery and acceptance, and this may hopefully begin to meet that need.

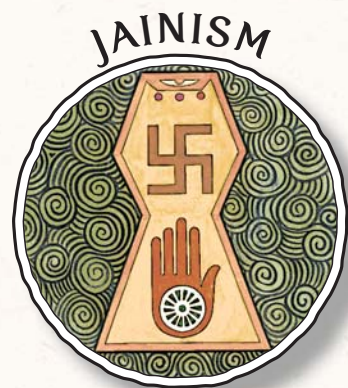




1. I believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.
2. I believe in the divinity of the *Vedas*, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the *Agamas* as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion which has neither beginning nor end.
3. I believe that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.
4. I believe in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.
5. I believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha, spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be eternally deprived of this destiny.
6. I believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments as well as personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.
7. I believe that a spiritually awakened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry and meditation.
8. I believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, noninjury.
9. I believe that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God's Pure Love and Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.



1. I believe that the Supreme is completely transcendent and can be described as Sunya, a void or state of nonbeing.
2. I believe in the Four Noble Truths: 1) that suffering is universal; 2) that desire is the cause of suffering; 3) that suffering may be ended by the annihilation of desire; 4) that to end desire one must follow the Eight-Fold Path.
3. I believe in the Eight-Fold Path of right belief, right aims, right speech, right actions, right occupation, right endeavor, right mindfulness and right meditation.
4. I believe that life's aim is to end suffering through the annihilation of individual existence and absorption into nirvana, the Real.
5. I believe in the Middle Path, living moderately, avoiding extremes of luxury and asceticism.
6. I believe in the greatness of self-giving love and compassion toward all creatures that live, for these contain merit exceeding the giving of offerings to the Gods.
7. I believe in the sanctity of the Buddha and in the sacred scriptures of Buddhism: the *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets of Wisdom) and/or the *Mahayana Sutras*.
8. I believe that man's true nature is divine and eternal, yet his individuality is subject to the change that affects all forms and is therefore transient, dissolving at liberation into nirvana.
9. I believe in dharma (the Way), karma (cause and effect), reincarnation, the *sanga* (brotherhood of seekers) and the passage on Earth as an opportunity to end the cycle of birth and death.



1. I believe in the spiritual lineage of the 24 Tirthankaras ("ford-makers"), of whom the ascetic sage Mahavira was the last—that they should be revered and worshiped above all else.
2. I believe in the sacredness of all life, that one must cease injury to sentient creatures, large and small, and that even unintentional killing creates karma.
3. I believe that God is neither creator, father nor friend. Such human conceptions are limited. All that may be said of Him is: He is.
4. I believe that each man's soul is eternal and individual and that each must conquer himself by his own efforts and subordinate the worldly to the heavenly in order to attain moksha, or release.
5. I believe the conquest of oneself can only be achieved in ascetic discipline and strict religious observance, and that nonascetics and women will have their salvation in another life (Digambara sect).
6. I believe that the principle governing the successions of life is karma, that our actions, both good and bad, bind us, and that karma may only be consumed by purification, penance and austerity.
7. I believe in the *Jain Agamas* and *Siddhantas* as the sacred scriptures that guide man's moral and spiritual life.
8. I believe in the Three Jewels: right knowledge, right faith and right conduct.
9. I believe the ultimate goal of moksha is eternal release from samsara, the wheel of birth and death, and the concomitant attainment of Supreme Knowledge.



1. I believe in God as the sovereign One, the omnipotent, immortal and personal Creator, a being beyond time, who is called Sat Nam, for His name is Truth.
2. I believe that man grows spiritually by living truthfully, serving selflessly and by repetition of the Holy Name and Guru Nanak's Prayer, Japaji.
3. I believe that salvation lies in understanding the divine Truth and that man's surest path lies in faith, love, purity and devotion.
4. I believe in the scriptural and ethical authority of the *Adi Granth* as God's revelation.
5. I believe that to know God the guru is essential as the guide who, himself absorbed in love of the Real, is able to awaken the soul to its true, divine nature.
6. I believe in the line of ten gurus: Guru Nanak, Guru Angad, Guru Amardas, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjun, Guru Har Govind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Har Krishnan, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Govind Singh—all these are my teachers.
7. I believe that the world is maya, a vain and transitory illusion; only God is true as all else passes away.
8. I believe in adopting the last name "Singh," meaning "lion" and signifying courage, and in the five symbols: 1) white dress (purity), 2) sword (bravery), 3) iron bracelet (morality), 4) uncut hair and beard (renunciation), and 5) comb (cleanliness).
9. I believe in the natural path and stand opposed to fasting, pilgrimage, caste, idolatry, celibacy and asceticism.



1. I believe that the Eternal may be understood as the Tao, or "Way," which embraces the moral and physical order of the universe, the path of virtue which Heaven itself follows, and the Absolute—yet so great is it that "the Tao that can be described is not the Eternal Tao."
2. I believe in the unique greatness of the sage Lao-tsu and in his disciple Chuang-tsu.
3. I believe in the scriptural insights and final authority of the *Tao te Ching* and in the sacredness of Chuang-tsu's writings.
4. I believe that man aligns himself with the Eternal when he observes humility, simplicity, gentle yielding, serenity and effortless action.
5. I believe that the goal and the path of life are essentially the same, and that the Tao can be known only to exalted beings who realize it themselves—reflections of the Beyond are of no avail.
6. I believe the omniscient and impersonal Supreme is implacable, beyond concern for human woe, but that there exist lesser Divinities—from the high Gods who endure for eons, to the nature spirits and demons.
7. I believe that all actions create their opposing forces, and the wise will seek inaction in action.
8. I believe that man is one of the Ten Thousand Things of manifestation, is finite and will pass; only the Tao endures forever.
9. I believe in the oneness of all creation, in the spirituality of the material realms and in the brotherhood of all men.



1. I believe in the presence of the Supreme Ruler in all things, and in Heaven as the ethical principle whose law is order, impersonal and yet interested in mankind.
2. I believe that the purpose of life is to follow an orderly and reverent existence in accord with Li, propriety or virtue, so as to become the Superior Man.
3. I believe in the Golden Rule: "Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you."
4. I believe that Confucius, China's first sage, is the Master of Life whose teachings embody the most profound understanding of Earth and Heaven, and that Mencius is China's second sage.
5. I believe in the writings of Confucius as scriptural truth and in the four sacred books: *The Analects*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, *Great Learning*, and *Mencius*.
6. I believe that each man has five relationships, entailing five duties to his fellow man: to his ruler, to his father, to his wife, to his elder brother and to his friend—the foremost being his familial duties.
7. I believe that human nature is inherently good, and evil is an unnatural condition arising from inharmony.
8. I believe that man is master of his own life and fate, free to conduct himself as he will, and that he should cultivate qualities of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and sincerity.
9. I believe that the family is the most essential institution among men, and that religion should support the family and the state.





1. I believe in the "Way of the Gods," Kami-no-michi, which asserts nature's sacredness and uniquely reveals the supernatural.
2. I believe there is not a single Supreme Being, but myriad Gods, superior beings, among all the wonders of the universe, which is not inanimate but filled everywhere with sentient life.
3. I believe in the scriptural authority of the great books known as the *Record of Ancient Things*, *Chronicles of Japan*, *Institutes of the Period of Yengi* and *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*.
4. I believe in the sanctity of cleanliness and purity—of body and spirit—and that impurity is a religious transgression.
5. I believe that the State is a divine institution whose laws should not be transgressed and to which individuals must sacrifice their own needs.
6. I believe in moral and spiritual uprightness as the cornerstone of religious ethics and in the supreme value of loyalty.
7. I believe that the supernatural reveals itself through all that is natural and beautiful, and value these above philosophical or theological doctrine.
8. I believe that whatever is, is Divine Spirit, that the world is a one brotherhood, that all men are capable of deep affinity with the Divine and that there exists no evil in the world whatsoever.
9. I believe in the practical use of ceremony and ritual, and in the worship of the Deities that animate nature, including the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, the Moon God Tsuki-yomi and the Storm God Sasa-no-wo.



1. I believe in God the Father, Creator of the universe, reigning forever distinct over man, His beloved creation.
2. I believe man is born a sinner, and that he may know salvation only through the Savior, Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son.
3. I believe that Jesus Christ was born of Mary, a virgin.
4. I believe that Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, then resurrected from the dead and now sits at the right hand of the Father as the final judge of the dead, and that He will return again as prophesied.
5. I believe that the soul is embodied for a single lifetime, but is immortal and accountable to God for all thoughts and actions.
6. I believe in the historical truth of the *Holy Bible*, that it is sacred scripture of the highest authority and the only word of God.
7. I believe that upon death and according to its earthly deeds and its acceptance of the Christian faith, the soul enters Heaven, Purgatory or Hell. There it awaits the Last Judgment when the dead shall rise again, the redeemed to enjoy life everlasting and the unsaved to suffer eternally.
8. I believe in the affirmative nature of life and in the priceless value of love, charity and faith.
9. I believe in the Holy Trinity of God, who reveals Himself as Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and in the existence of Satan, the personification of evil, deception and darkness.



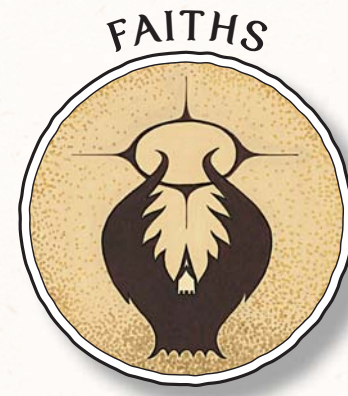
1. I believe there are two Great Beings in the universe. One, Ahura Mazda, created man and all that is good, beautiful and true, while the other, Angra Mainyu, vivifies all that is evil, ugly and destructive.
2. I believe that man has free will to align himself with good or evil, and when all mankind is in harmony with the God Ahura Mazda, Angra Mainyu will be conquered.
3. I believe the soul is immortal and upon death crosses over Hell by a narrow bridge—the good crossing safely to Heaven and the evil falling into Hell.
4. I believe that a savior named Sayoshant will appear at the end of time, born of a virgin, reviving the dead, rewarding the good and punishing the evil, and thereafter Ahura Mazda will reign.
5. I believe that Zoroaster, also known as Zarathustra, is the foremost Prophet of God.
6. I believe in the scriptural authority of the *Zend Avesta*.
7. I believe that purity is the first virtue, truth the second and charity the third—and that man must discipline himself by good thoughts, words and deeds.
8. I believe that marriage excels continence, action excels contemplation and forgiveness excels revenge.
9. I believe in God as Seven Persons: Eternal Light, Right and Justice, Goodness and Love, Strength of Spirit, Piety and Faith, Health and Perfection, and Immortality—and that He may best be worshiped through the representation of fire.



1. I believe that Allah is the Supreme Creator and Sustainer, all-knowing and transcendent and yet the arbiter of good and evil, the final judge of men.
2. I believe in the Five Pillars of Faith: 1) praying five times daily, 2) charity through alms-giving, 3) fasting during the ninth month, 4) pilgrimage to Holy Mecca in Saudi Arabia, and 5) profession of faith by acknowledging, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet."
3. I believe in the *Koran* as the Word of God and sacred scripture mediated through the Angel Gabriel to Mohammed.
4. I believe in the direct communion of each man with God, that all are equal in the eyes of God and therefore priests or other intercessors are unneeded.
5. I believe in the pure transcendence of God, great beyond imagining; no form or idol can be worshiped in His Name.
6. I believe that the soul of man is immortal, embodied once on Earth, then entering Heaven or Hell upon death according to its conduct and faith on Earth.
7. I believe in the Last Judgment and that man should stand in humble awe and fear of God's wrathful and vengeful power.
8. I believe that truthfulness should be observed in all circumstances, even though it may bring injury or pain.
9. I believe that salvation is only obtained through God's grace and not through man's efforts, yet man should do good and avoid all sins, especially drunkenness, usury and gambling.



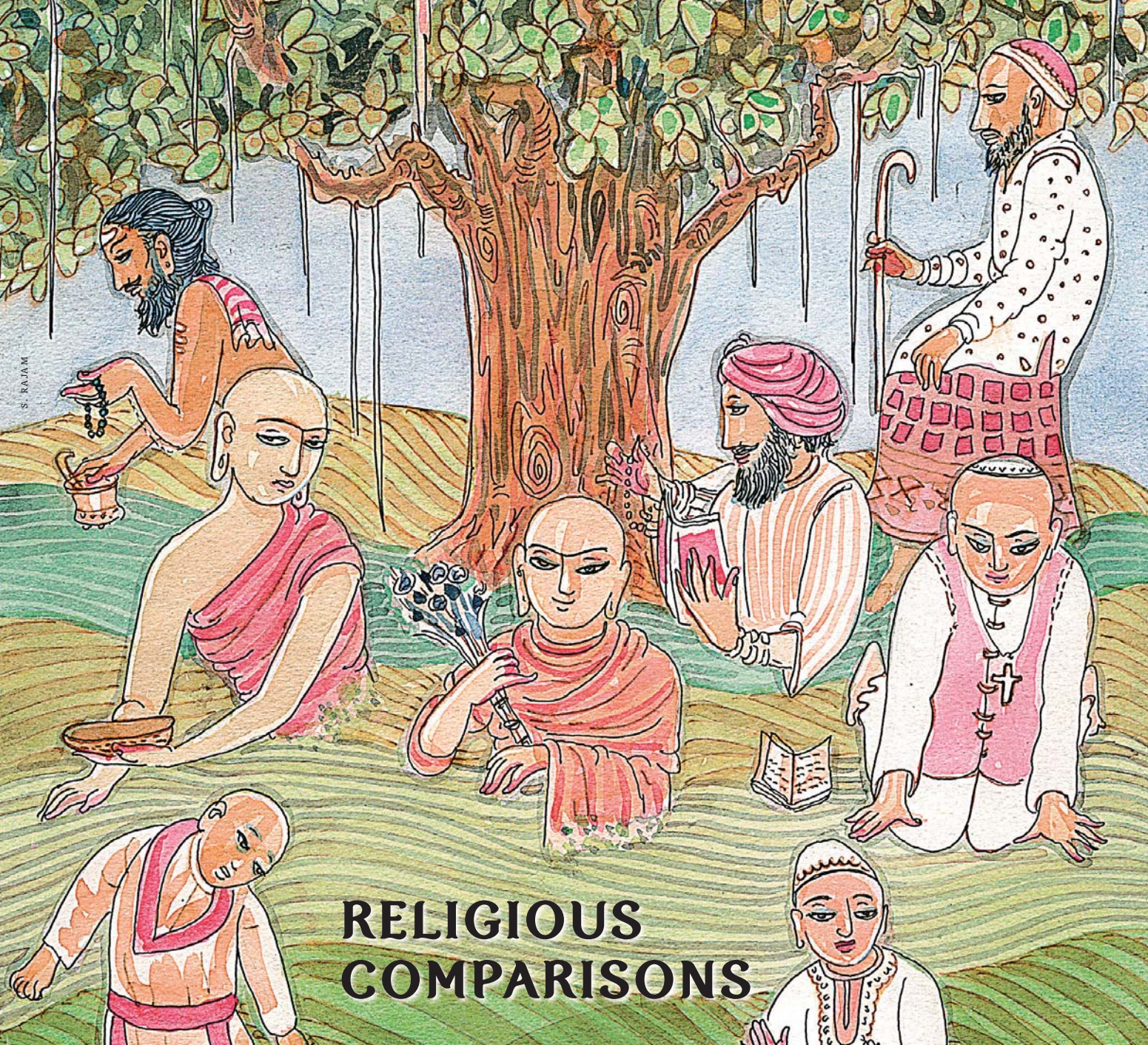
1. I believe in the One God and Creator who is incorporeal and transcendent, beyond the limitation of form, yet who cares for the world and its creatures, rewarding the good and punishing the evil.
2. I believe in the Prophets, of whom Moses was God's foremost, and in the Commandments revealed to him by God on Mount Sinai as man's highest law.
3. I believe in the *Torah* as God's word and scripture, composed of all the *Old Testament* books (the Hebrew Bible) and the *Talmud*. They are God's only immutable law.
4. I believe that upon death the soul goes to Heaven (or to Hell first if it has been sinful), that one day the Messiah will appear on Earth and there will be a Day of Judgment, and the dead shall be called to Life Everlasting.
5. I believe that the universe is not eternal, but was created by and will be destroyed by God.
6. I believe that no priest should intervene in the relationship of man and God, nor should God be represented in any form, nor should any being be worshiped other than the One God, Yahweh.
7. I believe in man's spiritualization through adherence to the law, justice, charity and honesty.
8. I believe that God has established a unique spiritual covenant with the Hebrew people to uphold for mankind the highest standards of monotheism and piety.
9. I believe in the duty of the family to make the home a House of God through devotions and ritual, prayers, sacred festivals and observance of the Holy Sabbath Day.



#### A SAMPLING OF BELIEFS OF FAITHS

1. I believe in the fundamental unity and common source of all religions. (Baha'i and Universalism)
2. I believe man's natural spirituality is best expressed in loving and practical aid to his fellow man, rather than metaphysical inquiry. (Humanitarianism)
3. I believe in polytheism, in the reality of Deities with different powers, in ritual ceremonies as a celebration of life and thanksgiving and in the practices of magic to effect real and positive changes. (Paganism)
4. I believe that spiritual progress comes through analysis of current and past life experiences which resolves past karma most directly. (Scientology)
5. I believe in communal spiritual ceremonies and divinatory rites, which produce a meditative trance to enhance consciousness and provide insights and direction for our life, and in libation, the ritual pouring of water as an offering to God. (African indigenous faith)
6. I believe man's sense of the sacred can be fulfilled naturally, without formal worship, houses of God, ceremony, creeds or theology. (various faiths)
7. I believe religion consists of unitive and direct mystical experience which should be the objective of every religious aspirant. (mysticism)
8. I believe that the cultivation of occult powers, including ESP, astral travel, past life readings, etc., is the highest pursuit of that which is spiritual. (occultism)
9. I believe in the intimate relationship of man, Spirit and the Earth—which is a living, sacred being—and in the brotherhood of all creatures. (indigenous tribalism)





## RELIGIOUS COMPARISONS

### I. EASTERN & WESTERN VIEWS

In the following analysis, using one of several common religious categorizations, we compare the Eastern religions with the Western ones on major points of belief. The Eastern religions are Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. The Western religions are Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam. We can see immediately that there is a vast difference between them, with the Eastern goals being unitive and introspective and the Western goals being dualistic, extroverted. The Eastern mind tends to see God everywhere, in all things, and to see everything as sacred. The Western



mind considers it heresy to believe that God pervades all things, and makes a strong difference between what is sacred and what is profane. In general we notice the Eastern holding to karma, reincarnation and liberation, the Western postulating a single life for the soul, followed by reward or punishment. Keep in mind that this is not a comprehensive comparison, as it does not take into account the East Asia religions—Taoism, Confucianism and Shinto. To discover your own belief patterns, take a pencil and put a check mark next to the view—Eastern or Western—which is closest to your own belief on each of the

subjects. We might note here that the Eastern religions described here all originated in India, and that Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism were offshoots of Hinduism. Among the Western faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam all share a common root in Abraham, and in recent times the term *Abrahamic* has been coined to denote these three

world religions. Naturally there are important exceptions to the views expressed (for example, Buddhism does not believe in a Personal God). Nevertheless these broad generalities are useful, as they give a theological window into the East and the West.

### DIFFERENCES

#### On Creation

**EASTERN VIEW:** The universe exists in endless cycles of creation, preservation and destruction. There is no absolute end to the world, neither is there a duality of God and world, but a unity based on the divine presence in all things.

**WESTERN VIEW:** The world was created by God and at some point in the future will be forever destroyed by Him. He is distinct from it and rules it from above. Stresses a dualistic nature of the world divided into good and evil.

#### On the True God

**EASTERN VIEW:** There is but one true and absolute God. All religions speak of Him. All souls are destined to receive God's grace through a process that takes them through diverse experiences on many paths according to their understanding, temperament and maturity of soul. God is pure Love and Consciousness but may be terrifying as well.

**WESTERN VIEW:** There is but one true God and one true religion. Those who accept it will enjoy God's grace; all others, unless they repent and come to my God, will suffer eternally in hell. God is loving as well as wrathful.

#### On Proof of God's Existence

**EASTERN VIEW:** Proof of God's existence and love lies in direct communion, and indirectly through enlightened gurus, the God-Realized men of all ages, and the revealed scriptures they bring forth in every age.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Proof of God's love and promise for man is in the person of His Prophet and in His unchanging and unique revealed scripture.

#### On Personal Experience of God

**EASTERN VIEW:** Personal, inner and often mystical experience of God is the crux of religion. Man can and ultimately must know God during earthly life. Individually oriented and introspective.

**WESTERN VIEW:** It is presumptuous for man to seek personal knowledge of God. The linchpin of religion is not experience but belief and faith coupled with a virtuous life. Socially oriented and extroverted.

#### On the Path to God, and Divine Judgment

**EASTERN VIEW:** Man is free to choose his form of worship, for all paths lead ultimately to God. Sin is only of the mind, not of the soul, which is pure. There is no Judgment Day, for God does not judge or punish. He lovingly guides all souls back to Himself.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Only one path leads to God, others are false and futile. Everyone must convert to the one true religion. Failing that, the soul, laden with sin, will be damned on Judgment Day.

#### On Man's Plight

**EASTERN VIEW:** Man's plight is but his soul's immaturity. He is ever on a progressive path which leads from ignorance to knowledge, from darkness to light, from death to immortality.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Man's plight is due to disobedience to God's will, to nonbelief and nonacceptance of His law.

#### On Hell

**EASTERN VIEW:** God is Love and is inextricably one with the soul, guiding it through karmas into the fulfillment of dharma and finally to moksha, liberation. Hell is a lower astral realm, not a physical place; nor is it eternal. Hell exists as a period of karmic intensity or suffering, a state of mind in life or between lives.

**WESTERN VIEW:** On Judgment Day the physical body of every soul that ever lived is brought to life, and God consigns pure souls to heaven and sinners to hell, a place or state where the body burns without being consumed and one suffers the anguish of knowing he will never be with God.

#### On Evil

**EASTERN VIEW:** There is no intrinsic evil. All is good. All is God. No force in the world or in man opposes God, though the veiling instinctive-intellectual mind keeps us from knowledge of Him.

**WESTERN VIEW:** There is indeed genuine evil in the world, a living force which opposes the will of God. This evil is embodied in Satan and his demons, and partially in man as one of his tendencies.

#### On Virtue and Salvation

**EASTERN VIEW:** Virtuous conduct and right belief are the foundation stones of religious life, the first step toward higher mystical communion. Liberation requires knowledge and personal attainment, not mere belief.

**WESTERN VIEW:** If one obeys God's commands for a moral and ethical life and believes in Him and in His Prophet—for example, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed or Zoroaster—salvation is assured.

#### On the Origin of Religion

**EASTERN VIEW:** Religion is cosmic, eternal, transcending human history, which is cyclical. Stress is placed on revelation of God's presence in the here and now.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Religion is historical, beginning with a prophet or event. Stress is placed on the past and on the rewards or punishments of the future. History is linear, never to be repeated.

#### Nature of Doctrines

**EASTERN VIEW:** Doctrines tend to be subtle, complex and even paradoxical. Freedom to worship and to believe in a variety of ways is predominant. Other paths are accepted as God's divine will at work. Universal and tolerant.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Doctrines tend to be simple, clear and rational. Worship and belief are formalized, exacting and required. Other paths are endured, but not honored. Exclusivist and dogmatic.

#### On Liberation and Enlightenment

**EASTERN VIEW:** The goals of enlightenment and liberation are to be found in this life, within the context of time, within man himself. Doctrines may be dual or nondual, dvaitic or advaitic.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Salvation comes at the end of the world, the end of time, and has nothing to do with enlightenment. Strictly dualistic, dvaitic. (Mystical sects, while minor, provide exceptions.)



### On the Nature of Worship

**EASTERN VIEW:** Worship is individual, highly ritualistic, rich in mantras and offerings, meditative, centering around the holy temple and the home shrine all days of the week.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Worship is congregational, led by a pastor or priest and simple in its rituals, centering around the church, synagogue or mosque, almost exclusively on a Sabbath day.

### On the Path to Sainthood

**EASTERN VIEW:** Path to saintliness is through self-discipline, purification, concentration and contemplation. Value is placed on ascetic ideals, individual sadhana, yoga, renunciation and superconscious awakening.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Path to saintliness is through self-sacrifice, submission to God and concern for the welfare of others. Value is placed on good works, piety and prayer, social concerns and scriptural study.

## SIMILARITIES

### On God and Devas

**EASTERN VIEW:** Belief in a Supreme Deity, maker of all souls and all things, and in lesser Deities and Mahadevas.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Belief in a Supreme Deity, maker of all souls and all things, and in the angels and celestial hosts.

### On Salvation and God's Will

**EASTERN VIEW:** Salvation is through strict obedience to God's will and the descent of His grace through the enlightened spiritual preceptor.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Salvation is through strict obedience to God's will, usually through a messiah, prophet or priest.

### On Good Conduct

**EASTERN VIEW:** To live a virtuous and moral life is essential to further spiritual progress, for adharmic thoughts, deeds and words keep us from knowledge of God's closeness.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Religion must be based on ethical and moral conduct, for their opposite leads us away from God.

### On the Destiny of the Soul

**EASTERN VIEW:** The purpose of life is to evolve, through experience, into our spiritual destiny. Things of the world are not the purpose of the world.

**WESTERN VIEW:** Man's destiny lies beyond this world, which is but an opportunity for earning eternal joy or suffering.

### On the Nature of Reality

**EASTERN VIEW:** There is more to reality than we experience with the five senses. The soul is immortal, deathless and eternal, ultimately merging in God.

**WESTERN VIEW:** There is more to reality than the things of this world. The soul is immortal, deathless and eternal, living forever in God's presence or separated from Him.

## II. HINDUISM & CHRISTIANITY

Our HINDUISM TODAY editors were contacted in 1993 by *Christianity Today* magazine to be interviewed for a major story called "Hindus in America." Thus began a series of dialogs that added to their article crucial and often corrective insights to dispel common myths and misinformation about the world's oldest religion. Perhaps most significantly, they agreed to publish



our own nine fundamental Hindu beliefs. The editors of *Christianity Today* composed nine parallel Christian convictions, written in a series of intense sessions by the best theologians they could assemble. The resulting point-counterpoint—whose brevity is both its strength and its weakness—summarizes the cosmic perspective of two of the world's largest faiths.

### On Revealed Scriptures

**HINDUS BELIEVE** in the divinity of the *Vedas*, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the *Agamas* as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion which has neither beginning nor end.

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** the *Bible* is the uniquely inspired and fully trustworthy word of God. It is the final authority for Christians in matters of belief and practice, and though it was written long ago, it continues to speak to believers today.

### On the Nature of God

**HINDUS BELIEVE** in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** in one God in three persons. He is distinct from his creation, yet intimately involved with it as its sustainer and redeemer.

### On the World's Creation

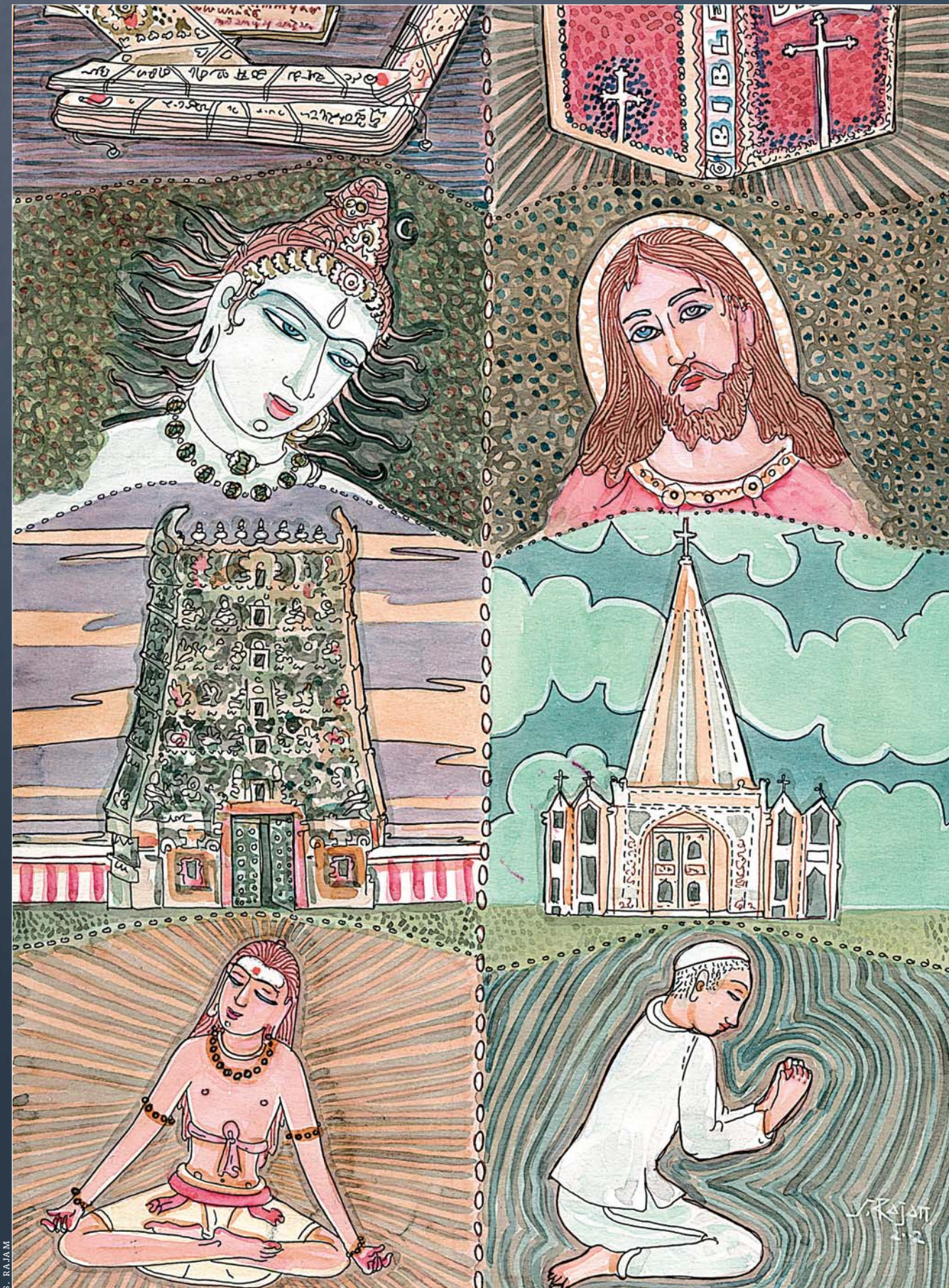
**HINDUS BELIEVE** that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** that the world was created once by the divine will, was corrupted by sin, yet under God's providence moves toward final perfection.

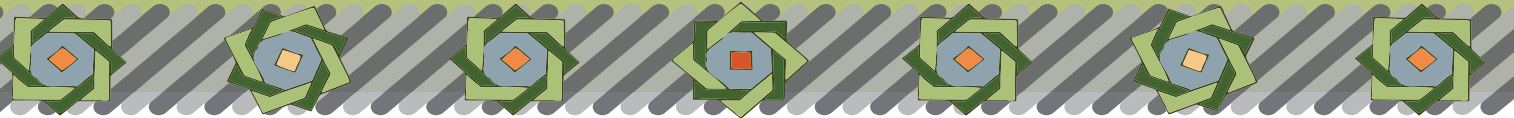
### On Karma and Destiny

**HINDUS BELIEVE** in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** that, through God's grace and favor, lost sinners are rescued from the guilt, power and eternal consequences of their evil thoughts, words and deeds.







#### On Incarnation and Liberation

**HINDUS BELIEVE** that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved and moksha, spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be eternally deprived of this destiny.

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** that it is appointed for human beings to die once and after that face judgment. In Adam's sin, the human race was spiritually alienated from God, and those who are called by God and respond to his grace will have eternal life. Those who persist in rebellion will be lost eternally.

#### On Worship of Divine Beings

**HINDUS BELIEVE** that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments as well as personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** that spirit beings inhabit the universe, some good and some evil, but worship is due to God alone.

#### On Spiritual Guidance

**HINDUS BELIEVE** that a spiritually awakened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry and meditation.

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** that God has given us a clear revelation of Himself in Jesus and the sacred Scriptures. He has empowered by his Spirit prophets, apostles, evangelists, and pastors who are teachers charged to guide us into faith and holiness in accordance with his Word.

#### On Noninjury and the Sanctity of Life

**HINDUS BELIEVE** that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, "noninjury."

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** that life is to be highly esteemed but that it must be subordinated in the service of Biblical love and justice.

#### On the Way to Salvation

**HINDUS BELIEVE** that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God's Pure Love and Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.

**CHRISTIANS BELIEVE** that Jesus is God incarnate and, therefore, the only sure path to salvation. Many religions may offer ethical and spiritual insights, but only Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

## III. JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY & ISLAM

The similarities between these three Abrahamic religions are stronger than their differences, though historically it is the differences that have been stressed. They each believe in a single life, followed by heaven or hell. They agree that God is opposed by evil, by Satan, who tempts and destroys sinners by causing disobedience to God's law. They are all prophet-oriented, though Christianity is the only one to make the prophet divine. They believe in their religion as the one and only true religion, and that nonbelievers are condemned, though Judaism is more tolerant or universal, believing God judges all men of all



religions by their actions. These three Biblical religions are strongly monotheistic and dualistic, believing man is eternally separate from God and that man's highest destiny is in heaven. Together they rely not so much on inner experience or mystical contact and guidance, as on sacred rites, on faith and belief, and on good works to guide man Godward. Each believes that God has a special covenant with its members, though the terms differ. They each bury their dead, anticipating that the physical body will one day be resurrected on the Earth, rising from the grave on Judgment Day.

#### On the True Religion

**JUDAISM:** There is but one true religion, Judaism, and one revealed scripture, the *Torah*, which includes the *Old Testament* and the *Talmud*.

**CHRISTIANITY:** There is but one true religion, Christianity, and one scripture—the *Holy Bible*, *Old and New Testaments*.

**ISLAM:** The one true faith is Islam, and the *Koran* is the highest revealed scripture, but other books are honored as revealed too, including the *Bible* and certain Hindu scriptures.

#### On Genesis and Original Sin

**JUDAISM:** Points to Adam, his temptation, the resulting original sin and fall from grace. Some early and modern religious thinkers interpret this narrative as an allegory of the human condition.

**CHRISTIANITY:** The same, but taking Adam's story literally.

**ISLAM:** Same, but Allah forgave Adam. Therefore, there is no original sin.

#### On the Proof of God's Power

**JUDAISM:** Such proof can be seen in the historic Exodus.

**CHRISTIANITY:** Proof of God's power lies in Christ's resurrection.

**ISLAM:** Proof of God's power is in the *Koran* itself.

#### On Man's Obligation to God

**JUDAISM:** Jews are obligated exclusively to Yahweh, since He delivered them out of Egypt.

**CHRISTIANITY:** Man is obligated to God, since He sacrificed His Son for man's sins.

**ISLAM:** There exists no special obligation; avoidance of hell is man's motivation.

#### On the Means to Salvation

**JUDAISM:** Salvation is through strict adherence to the Law as stated in the *Torah*.

**CHRISTIANITY:** Salvation is through acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior.

**ISLAM:** Salvation is through total submission to Allah.

This concludes our comparison of humanity's many faiths, affording those who read it carefully an overview of those intangible philosophical and theological beliefs which, in all their variety, lie at the root of our attitudes and behavior that, over time, create culture.



## OPINION

# How to Engage Young Hindus?

Social activities held by youth groups can unite the youth and encourage them to form bonds of friendship from within the mandir

BY SHAWN BINDA

I WISH TO TELL YOU MY STORY OF GROWING UP in Canada as a Hindu where Hinduism was not the dominant religion and where Hindi was not the language spoken at home. Hopefully, it will encourage change needed to ensure that today's young Hindus are proud of who they are and where they come from—proud of a religion and way of life that has been passed down since the dawn of time.

My parents were born in Trinidad and moved to Canada in the 1970s. After my siblings and I were born, my parents decided to send us to Catholic school, believing that Catholic schools had better discipline and educational values. I led a double life as my friends at school did not know I was Hindu and I certainly did not want that secret coming out. In 1989 my father and a group of dedicated families established the Devi Mandir in Pickering, Ontario. In 1998, the mandir construction was completed and we moved our services from the small house to the temple—a common scenario throughout North America. During these years, life went on as usual with school pressures, finding a career and establishing myself in society.

I accepted the double life, but never rejected my Hindu culture. From childhood, then school through university graduation, the mandir was always central to my life. Why? Later I realized that it was because of my parents. They taught me everything. Having parents who dedicated their time and effort to maintaining a mandir meant that as a child growing up mandir culture was instilled by default—if they went to the temple, we went also as we were too young to be left at home. But we weren't forced. My siblings and I were deeply involved in music. Performing regularly during services and other programs as we grew up meant that we also wanted to be there. Music was our hook, our attraction. Having friends there was also a reason to attend. I looked forward to spending Sunday afternoons after service playing sports or other games. Some days we spent hours just talking and hanging out in the mandir. But the temple was plagued with the usual pattern of older teens dropping out. Once they had car keys and other interests, they could go anywhere and stopped coming to the mandir.

Music was my own connection that kept me involved in mandir life, but not everyone is a musician. Hinduism in North America will flourish if we take action today to create more "hooks" to attract youth. The mandir must be recognized as a central pillar in every Hindu's life, especially since we live in a society where Hinduism is not the dominant religion. Hindu teachings, science and beliefs have so much to offer; and it is important that we create an environment that encourages youth participation in a manner that is attractive and fun. This involves work and action. Simply writing "feel good" articles does nothing. The days of going to mandir and being actively



involved just because your parents said so are over. We have a duty to act and make the future we envision.

Education must play a primary role in ensuring that children and youth are equipped with the knowledge that has been passed down from the ancient rishis. We are not just born a Hindu, rather, we have to choose to be Hindu. Hinduism has much to offer the world and we need to inspire the next generation to start carrying the torch of Sanatana Dharma.

In 2004 we established the DM Youth group to address the challenge of engaging youth. The creation of DM Youth went against the established norms. Administratively it was completely independent of the mandir. We regulated ourselves without interference from mandir management or the adults. We opened our own

bank account and raised money to run our own events without asking anything from the mandir management. Our aim was to bring youths together through social activities and outreach, to unite the youth and encourage them to form bonds of friendship from within the mandir. We hosted events, arranged anniversary dinner and dances, went on field trips, arranged seminars and workshops. We also gave back to the community through service at the mandir such as dishwashing after weekly satsang, volunteering to help with Diwali and Holi festivals and various outreach activities such as food drives, sponsoring children in India, as well as establishing a yearly scholarship for any high school graduates who attend the mandir.

DM Youth is still strong today, but numerous Hindu youth groups have been launched and failed. One main cause is the style of adult involvement. Though well-intentioned, adults usually end up dictating the youth agenda, forcing them to be fund raisers or a work force for temple activities. While volunteer service is a cornerstone of Hinduism, this should not be a youth group's sole focus. At a time when youth need inspiration and are already faced with so many external pressures and outside influences, turning them into a labor force deters participation. It is a recipe for disaster.

DM Youth has led to many opportunities to teach youths about teamwork, volunteerism and management skills from an early age. These skills have helped me in dealing with a variety of situations in my professional life. Being involved also gave me a sense of purpose as I felt the need to give back to the community that I grew up in. It was about moving away from a selfish life to one where I have a duty to the society that I live in. Attending mandir and being part of a youth group has led me to seek more knowledge of Hinduism and, in turn, educate those who are younger in the hopes of inspiring them to do the same.

SHAWN BINDA, 32, is a radiation therapist at Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto, Canada, and an active member of the Devi Mandir located in Pickering, Ontario, Canada.





ALL TOP PHOTOS: ANANTHA KRISHNAN

## TEMPLE WORSHIP

# Feeding God In Gratitude

A joyous ancient ritual of thanksgiving celebrates the divine source of the sustenance of our lives

BY ANANTHA KRISHNAN, TAMIL NADU  
**R**ICE IS THE STAPLE FOOD FOR US HERE in South Asia and the *annabhishekam*, “food bath,” with cooked rice for God Siva, is an act of thanks to the cosmic energy for providing us this magical grain. The festival is detailed by our *Saiva Agamas*, which tell us to cover the Sivalingam with layers of cooked, consecrated rice in the evening of the full moon day in the month of Tula (October–November). It is also believed that this annual ritual ensures plentiful food for all living beings on Earth in the coming year.

Nowhere is annabhishekam done in such grandeur as in Gangaikondacholapuram, a small sleepy village in the vicinity of Tanjavur in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The size of the ritual is due to the massive stone temple and its huge Sivalingam, built in 1020 CE by the King Rajendra Chola I, in this once bustling capital city of his domain.

The celebration here is a two-day affair. On the first day a complete Agamic mahabhishekam is done. All the smaller Deities in the temple corridors are washed and decorated with new clothes and sacred sandalwood,

holy ash and kumkum. For Siva, the main Deity, a traditional abhishekam (bathing) is performed with the full spectrum of offerings prescribed by our scriptures: water with sandalwood paste, turmeric water, milk, orange juice, honey, coconut, yogurt, water and sacred ash—all mixed and stored in separate, huge containers. About fifteen *vidyarthi*s, students of *Vedas*, stand atop scaffolding to reach the top of the massive Sivalingam, pouring over it the various mixtures while chanting “Sri Rudram.” At the end of the abhishekam, the Lord is decorated with giant flower garlands worth Rs. 10,000 (\$200). The cost involved for this two-day ritual is roughly Rs. 6,00,000 (\$12,000), which is raised through donations. Apart from cash, people also offer rice, often by the bag.

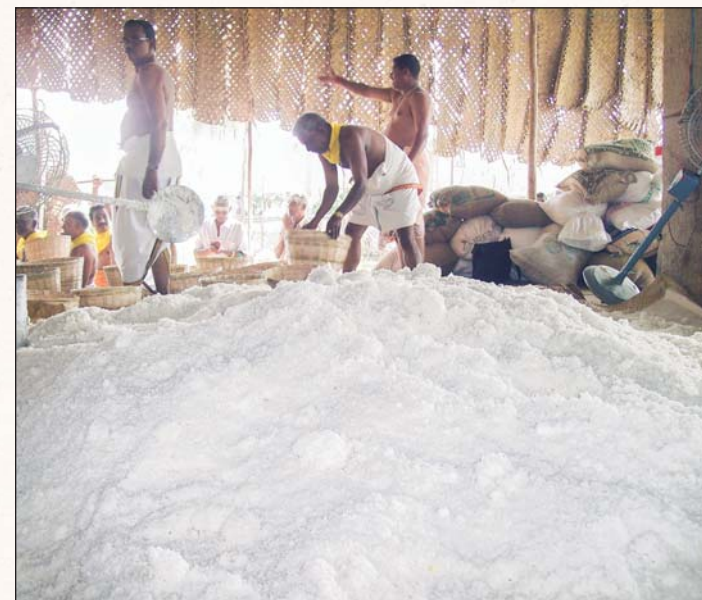
On the second day, volunteers are given yellow scarves to stand apart from hoards of people pouring in from nearby towns and villages. I was one of them. Police, barricades, a medical pavilion, a PA system broadcasting the *Tirumurai* songs on Lord Siva, are all in place from the break of dawn. About fifty bags (each weighing 75–100 kilograms) of top quality rice are cooked in four large vessels, powered by a massive wood stove.

**Source of life:** (clockwise from above) the Sivalingam covered in rice; four giant pots used to cook the rice; the rice piled up to cool; a human chain of volunteers line up to send baskets of cooked rice from the lower levels of the temple up to the inner sanctum where the priests use it to cover the murti

Shovels are used to spread out the cook rice on the floor to cool before being transferred into bamboo baskets. Some 50–60 volunteers form a line from the kitchen, up the steep stairway, all the way to the sanctum. Chanting the praise of Siva, “Om Namah Shivaya, Hara Hara Shankara,” fills the air as the baskets of rice are passed hand-to-hand in a swift and constant motion.

From 9AM, throughout the day, the Vedic students chant “Sri Rudram” continuously during the annabhishekam until the event slowly grinds to a halt at around 5PM. Steel mesh around the Deity holds the grain intact as the normally dark, black granite stone is transformed into a pure white Sivalingam. An assortment of vegetables decorate the top, and the final offering of light is performed with fervor running high among the gathered devotees.

As the sun descends across the western horizon, a golden glow illuminates the tall temple tower, and a sea of humanity waits in line to take home the rice as prasadam. All of God Siva’s creations, people including poor villagers, plants and animals down to critters are fed with this prasadam, not letting a single grain go to waste.



## The Stunning Chola Temples of Tamil Nadu

**T**HE CHOLA KINGS OF TAMIL NADU were among the greatest of India’s temple builders. One of India’s longest-lived dynasties, the line of rulers stretches back to 300 BCE. They came into prominence in the 9th century and reigned until being overthrown by the neighboring rival Pandys in 1279. The Cholas dedicated their wealth to the temple arts and built many giant temples, which the Pandyas left intact. Gangaikondacholapuram, the temple at the capital city built by Rajendra Chola I (1012–1044 CE), was especially beautiful.

Later, invaders began looting and destroying the temples, beginning with the Islamic raider Malik Kafur, followed by French army occupation and another Islamic attack by Arcot Nawab. The English dismantled much of the structure of Gangaikondacholapuram, taking away stones, some with inscriptions, to be used in constructing dams. Experts believe what is left of the temple today is only about half of its original form. See: [kumbakonam.info](http://kumbakonam.info)



**Gangaikondacholapuram:** A protected World Heritage Site, the temple has had extensive restoration done by the Archeological Survey of India.





ALL PHOTOS: SRIKRISHNA MUSEUM

EXHIBITS

# Exploring Kurukshetra's Museum for Lord Krishna

Srikrishna Museum offers a comprehensive and immersive experience through historical artifacts and modern multimedia exhibits

BY THIRTHO BANERJEE, CHANDIGARH  
THE MULTIFACETED MYSTIQUE OF Krishna—His endearing act of stealing butter, standing with a flute in His hands, His antics with the gopis, vanquishing the demoness Putana and rendering His seminal message to Arjuna on the battlefield of *Mahabharata*—all comes alive in the spacious Srikrishna Museum in the town of Kurukshetra, the very site of the epic's great battle in ancient times.

The museum was established in 1987 by

the Kurukshetra Development Board, and successive expansions were opened by two presidents of India: R. Venkatarama in 1991 and Pratibha Devisingh Patil in 2012. It consists today of seven galleries: woodcraft, ivory and metal; archeological objects; miniatures and manuscripts; paintings in regional styles; folk art; tableaux of Krishna's life; and a multimedia exhibit on the *Mahabharata*. Together these encompass the museum's attempts to capture Krishna's exploits in a multitude of formats, from the simplest

media to modern video presentation. If the reviews on tripadvisor.com are any indication—and they usually are—this is a place well worth visiting, ranked “excellent” by all twelve reviewers. One remarked, “well maintained, neat and clean; fabulous collection of wood works.” Another called it “a place to relive the *Mahabharata*.”

The experience starts as you approach the museum and view the huge bas reliefs of key scenes from Krishna's life that adorn the upper story. Inside, after paying a modest en-

**Celebrating Lord Krishna:** (left to right) main entrance to the Srikrishna Museum is adorned with scenes from the Mahabharata and other scriptures; a life-size Yashoda, Krishna's foster-mother with Krishna in her arms and Krishna's elder brother, Balarama, by her side; stunning 30-inch high sandalwood carving of Krishna playing the flute

trance fee (US\$0.50 for adults), you are greeted by Lord Ganesha in a dance pose.

The first gallery contains wood and ivory carvings and metal castings, mostly from Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Wooden panels from Orissa belonging to the 18th and 19th centuries include a depiction of the ten avatars of Vishnu, Krishna's killing of a demon bull, and His curing of a hunchbacked lady. The wood sculptures from Tamil Nadu tend to be massive, while those from Karnataka are delicate renderings in sandalwood. One exceptionally beautiful carving (far right, above) shows Krishna playing the flute in the classic *tribhanga* pose, with gentle bends at the neck, waist and knee. Another carving portrays Krishna's encounter with the demoness Putana, who intended to kill Him. Putana is portrayed both alive with the baby Krishna in her arms, and dead

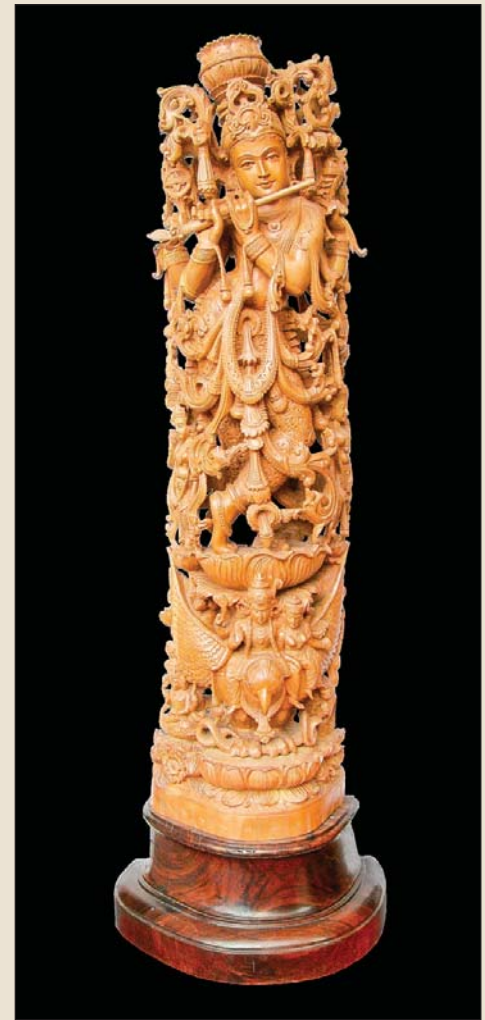
on the floor when the attempted poisoning backfired.

All the art in the museum is from the epics or the *Puranas*, so nearly all the scenes and even specific poses of Krishna will be well known to a devotee. The artistry, then, is found in the sensitive depiction of the traditional concept, and not in new interpretation.

A highlight of the first gallery is a two-sided wood carving from Karnataka. On one side is Krishna as Venugopal; the other side is an exquisitely carved image of Gajendra Moksha (Vishnu rescuing the elephant).

An unusual item is a cradle suspended by an arch of glass. This is a popular form of worship in which on the eleventh day of Bhadrapad, devotees place a statue of baby Krishna in the cradle and rock it.

Among the many metal sculptures on display here is the bronze statue pictured above



(above) of Yashoda with Krishna and Balarama, from Ganjam, Orissa.

The collection of ivory carvings evokes mixed feelings: appreciation of their exquisite beauty tempered by concern for the modern-day practice of killing elephants solely for their tusks. Such a practice was unknown in ancient India, where an live elephant was worth a great deal more than his or her tusks. Even upsetting an elephant was a serious offense, let alone killing one.

One such ivory carving, on page 52, depicts Yashoda scolding the child Krishna. Another (page 53) shows Krishna's prowess where he lifts Mount Govardhana with the small finger of his left hand. Perhaps the finest shows Krishna playing the flute in tribhanga pose, wearing a floral garland, sacred thread, earrings and crown.

The second gallery is devoted to archeological finds reaching back thousands of years. Prized items in this collection include pottery, conch shells and Indus seals recovered from the now submerged site of Krishna's Dwarka home. These have been dated to 1500bce. Also in this collection is a replica





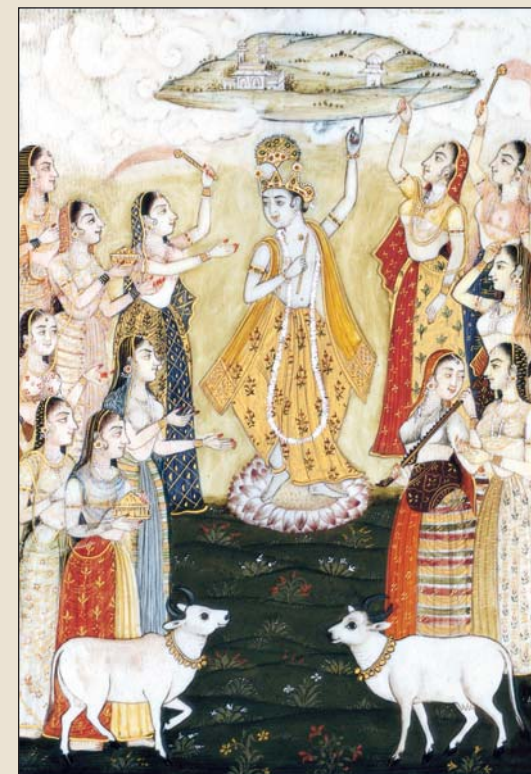
**Krishna through the centuries:** (top left) One of several tableaux, life-size scenes from Krishna's life. A narration explaining the scene starts when the visitor steps in front of the exhibit. (top right) Krishna plays the flute in this 18-inch sandalwood carving from Karnataka. (below left) This 2nd-century-bce coin depicts Krishna with His chakra wheel and conch. (below middle) Yashoda chastises Krishna in this 7-inch tall ivory carving from Tamil Nadu.



ALL PHOTOS: SRIKRISHNA MUSEUM

(above) This 15-foot wide, eight-foot high relief work on the museum wall depicts an archery contest between the Kauravas and the Pandavas in which the warriors must hit targets on a spinning wheel above them. (below left) Krishna holds Mount Govardhana

in this 4- by 6-inch miniature Mughal painting on an ivory sheet from the 18th century. (below right) Krishna kills Kamsa in a four-foot wide 20th-century Madhubani-style painting from Bihar.



(photo above) of an Indo-Greek copper coin issued by the Greek king Agathocles in the 2nd century bce, the earliest representation of Krishna in Indian art and iconography. The king's name is inscribed in Brahmi script. One side of the coin shows Balarama carrying a club and a plough; the other side shows Krishna carrying a chakra wheel and a conch shell. The coin was found at Ai-khanum in Afghanistan—far from Mathura, where the worship of Krishna is believed to have begun. This indicates the widespread popularity of Krishna at this time, plus the respect shown to Him by the Indo-Greek kings.

The third gallery features palm-leaf etchings and miniature paintings focusing on Krishna's exploits. It includes old manuscripts, such as the rare *Yoga Vashishtha* in Gurmukhi. A set of 26 paintings develops the theme of *Bhagavad Gita* and *Mahabharata*. On the octagonal parapet wall of this gallery, crucial episodes from the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Mahabharata*, mostly on religious themes, are exhibited on eight *pat-tachitras*. In this artistic technique, the scenes are painted on cloth coated with soft

stone powder. Making use of various plants and mineral colors, the artists combine classical art with folk themes. The centerpiece of the third gallery is a set of Thanjavur paintings of Krishna's childhood. These are made on wood with cloth pasted over them and decorated with gold leaf and precious stones.

The fourth gallery features life-size tableaux from the *Mahabharata*, executed in various regional art styles. A Manipuri-style work depicts the Raslila, the cosmic dance of Krishna and the gopis. Other works are executed in the Madhubani folk style (see page 53, bottom right).

The fifth gallery presents a collection of murals created by artists of different schools. The artists had been invited from all over India for the museum's annual Gita Jayanti festival in 2002.

The sixth gallery incorporates more modern technology in nine tableaux depicting the episodes of the life and exploits of Krishna are accompanied by narration, music and even sound effects.

The seventh and final gallery—actually three separate exhibition areas—extends

over three floors. Called the "Multimedia *Mahabharata* and *Gita* Gallery," it presents the story of the *Mahabharata* in a chronological fashion. Included are murals, mannequins, paintings and huge scenes, such as the one at top of page 53 depicting a contest between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Another shows Bhishma's abduction of Amba, Ambika and Ambalika, the three daughters of the king of Kashi. Still others display the Kaurava and Pandava princes under the tutelage of their guru, Drona.

No modern technique is left out in this gallery. The curved hallways are lined with interactive computer displays, videos and animations. The last area of this section comprises a huge circular battle formation called Chakravayuha. Murals show Drishtadhyumna's assassination of Dronacharya, the commander in chief of Pandavas; the tragic end of Karna; the duel between Bhima and Duryodhana; the humiliation of Ashwathama; and Gandhari cursing Krishna. It is a spectacularly immersive end to an marvelous exhibit.

Visit: [bit.ly/SriKrishnaMuseum](http://bit.ly/SriKrishnaMuseum)





COURTESY PERUMAL STHAPATI

## SACRED SCULPTURE

# Bringing Gods to Earth Through Stone

The story of Perumal Sthapati, one of India's finest stone carvers, exemplifies an age-old Hindu tradition experiencing a resurgence in the 21st century

BY R. KESAV MALLIA, TELANGANA

**O**N DECEMBER 12, 2005, IN NEW DELHI, Perumal Sthapati was presented the coveted National Award for Master Craftsmanship by Abdul Kalam, the then President of India. The award was established in 1965 to honor the country's top craftsmen and weavers in multiple specialties through a national competition each year. Perumal's winning entry was a spectacular dual image with Vishwakarma Siva on one side and Gayatri on the other, carved in green granite that he labored on for nine months.

Perumal was born in Thrissur, Kerala, in 1954 and grew up in Thenkasi, Tamil Nadu. His father, a stone carver by the name of Sundaram Acharya, passed away when Perumal was just fifteen, leaving the family in poverty. Perumal left his native village to work in Mamallapuram (previously called Mahabalipuram), the ancient seaside "stone town" just south of Chennai. Mamallapuram was

bustling with activity. South India's greatest traditional architect, V. Ganapati Sthapati, was bringing scores of carvers to the town to meet the growing demand for temple stone carvings. He immediately spotted the innate talent of the 19-year-old Perumal. "You stay here with me," he told the boy, and took him under his personal tutelage.

Perumal recounts those days: "I could read my guru's heart, his taste, his mind and expectations. He was a clever taskmaster, yet surprisingly lovable. I was a bit afraid of him. He could smell even the slightest error. Ever since I joined him, I had no time for any other activities or entertainment. Today, when I carve a statue, I have a secure feeling that my guru is standing beside me and guiding me in every bit of my chipping." The two worked together until Ganapati Sthapati's passing in 2011, when Perumal became one of the trustees of his guru's Vaastu Vedic Research Foundation in Mamallapuram.

### A Life's Work

Perumal Sthapati has been carving for the last 40 years. To date he has sculpted over 80 murtis of Vinayaka, 50 of Venkateswara and many other Deities as well. He is fully booked, with orders a year in advance.

In May, 2014, when HINDUISM TODAY interviewed Perumal in his workshop at the Foundation in Mamallapuram, he was placing the finishing touches on two murtis destined for Malaysia, a four-foot-tall Ganesha and a five-foot-tall Venkateswara.

Much of his best work has gone overseas. His murtis of the Gods now reside at the Lakshmi Narayana Temple in London, in Batu Caves and the Mariamman Temple in Malaysia, in Singapore's Murugan and Bhadrakali temples and in Chicago, Fiji and New Jersey. For a temple in St. Louis, Missouri, he created some 20 murtis. For Sri Lanka he sculpted an eight-foot-tall sitting Buddha. His reclining Vishnu (photo next page)



M. DEIVARAYAN

**Master Carver and Family Man:** (left) Perumal works on an exquisite murti of Lord Ganesha; (above) with author Kesav Mallia (center) and Perumal's two sons (left) Krishnamurthy, wife Kamakshi and daughter Pranavi, (right) son Mallia with wife Leelavathy and son Tarun





**Works in stone:** (top to bottom) the Gayatri side of his award-winning Vishwakarma/Gayatri sculpture in green granite; using charcoal as a marker, Sthapati makes a full scale drawing, one of the primary skill sets of his trade; working on the 10-foot-tall Ananta Padmanabha (sleeping Vishnu)

is enshrined in the Siva-Vishnu Temple in Maryland.

Many works are in progress. A dozen three-foot-tall murtis will go to a Sai Baba temple in Madurai, Tamil Nadu. A four-foot Murugan, a Ganesha, a Shannuga and Mayura are destined for a Murugan temple in Sri Lanka. A large Venkateswara murti like the one at the Tirupati Temple in Andhra Pradesh is being sculpted for a temple at Bengaluru.

Talking about his process, Perumal explains, "When I am asked to carve a Ganesha murti, I get totally merged into the carving of Ganesha and become Ganesha Himself. I normally do not work with a limited time frame but rather carve the Ganesha until I am fully satisfied with it. Internal visualization is important. Only then can you bring out the mental impressions in you and carve them physically on the stone."

Stone carving is time consuming. A five-foot Dwarapalaka (guard at the door) will take six months. A three-foot-tall murti may take three months. The eight-foot-tall standing Vishnu for a temple in Hyderabad took a full year. Five years were spent on the 18-foot Ranganathar in reclining pose.

In the 1990s Perumal assisted with the ornamental carving designs for the Iraivan Temple commissioned by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (founder of HINDUISM TODAY) for his Kauai ashram. Perumal recalls, "I was involved for over a year at the beginning. I worked on the first few of the intricate ornamental carvings. I showed the other shilpis how to carve them and then did some follow-up. I have a lot of affection and bhakti towards Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. After Rajaraja Chola [1000 ce], Gurudeva is the only one who is carving a totally hand-made granite temple. Gurudeva allows us to work carefully on all the intricate designs. He insisted on quality and wanted to bring the intricate works of stone to the West. Most people these days do not have the patience, money and time as he had to wait 12 to 15 years to complete a temple."

At the age of 60, Perumal Sthapati remains one-pointedly focused on his work. Still healthy and fit, he rises at 5am, walks for one hour, then has breakfast and reaches his workplace in a two-wheeler at 8am. He returns home at 7pm. "I have no desire to retire; when at home in the late evening hours, I will always be thinking about my next day's work. If the murti does not shape up as I want, then I will be very sad and frustrated." When asked about his hobbies, Perumal chuckles, "No hobbies, except stone carving. All I want is that people will appreciate my work after I die."



## India's "Statue of Liberation"

Two memorials stand on islands off the coast at India's southernmost point. At left in the photo below is the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, dedicated in 1970. In 1892, Swami Vivekananda, at the time a wandering monk, swam over 1,000 feet to this island whereafter he meditated for three days and had a vision of his life's mission. At right is the 133-foot-tall granite statue of Saint Tiruvalluvar. He lived over 2,000 years ago and wrote the *Tirukural*, a work of 1330 couplets about religion, friendship, vegetarianism, moral living, business and government. Perumal Sthapati worked on the Tiruvalluvar project for

ten years, right from its inception. His particular responsibilities were the 19-foot-tall face (pictured below) and the equally enormous hands and feet. Hundreds of workers and sculptors were engaged in the project. Stones were carved at a worksite on the nearby shore, then taken by boat out to the small island. Each stone, some weighing thousands of pounds, was then lifted into place with ropes and pulleys fixed to a scaffold of strong palm trees. This is the biggest statue in Tamil Nadu. India's version of the American Statue of Liberty, it is endearingly known as the Statue of Liberation.



THOMAS KELLY



THOMAS KELLY



COURTESY PERUMA STHAPATI





## CULTURE

# Women's Status in Ancient India

Hinduism's revealed scriptures summon forth high regard for women

BY NIRMAL LAUNGANI

THEY CALL IT A BAD RAP WHEN SOMEONE is wrongly accused of something, and in recent Indian history both women and Hinduism have suffered just such an injustice. To be sure, women are sometimes egregiously mistreated in India, as elsewhere in the world. But this is not owing to Hinduism. Indeed, it is a violation of the Sanatana Dharma. Although the position of women declined in modern times—especially during the long period of foreign rule, which disrupted every aspect of society—most scholars agree that women in ancient India held a most elevated position. They had similar education as men and participated

with men in philosophical debates. During Vedic times, women so inclined wore the sacred thread and were taught the holy mantras of the *Vedas*. Some were *brahmavadinis*, women who devoted their lives to scriptural study, expounded the *Vedas* and wrote some of the Vedic hymns. Women of the kshatriya (warrior) caste received martial arts coaching and arms training. The *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and other scriptures give numerous examples of women philosophers, politicians, teachers, administrators and saints. The *Rig Veda* says, "The wife and husband, being the equal halves of one substance, are equal in every respect; therefore, both should join and

take equal parts in all works, religious and secular." The *Upanishads* clearly declare that we individual souls are neither male nor female. Hinduism teaches that each of us passes through many lives, both male and female. It further teaches the law of karma, which informs us that what we do to others will in turn be done to us—and that ahimsa, non-hurtfulness, must be the guiding precept of our lives. Thus, Hinduism gives no justification for the mistreatment of others, whether on the basis of gender or for any other reason. (In the actual lives of adherents, of course—as in any religion—"results may vary.")

Comparing the general position of women

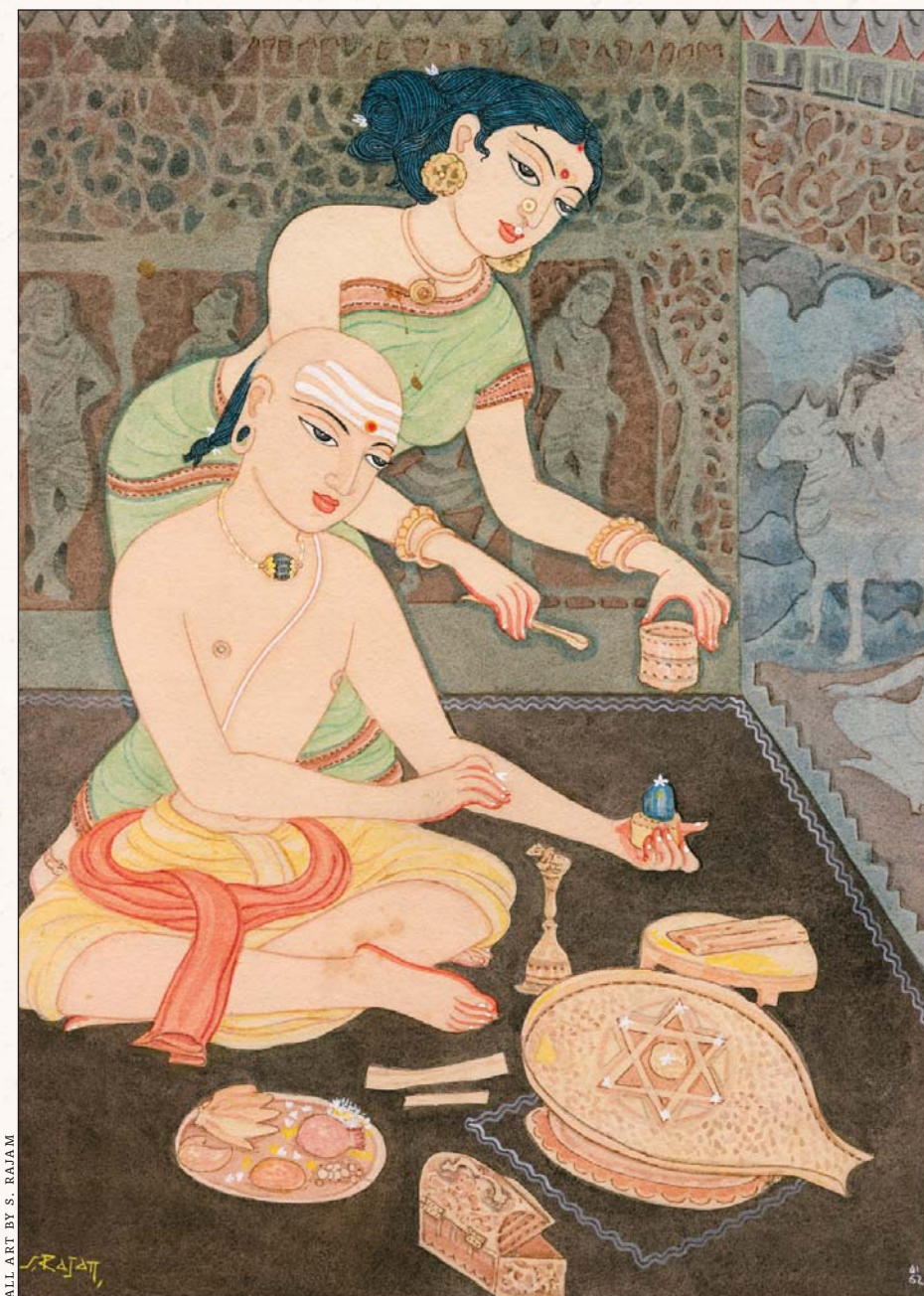
**Music, Arts & Spirituality:** Throughout history women have been among the great poets, musical composers and artists of India. Their prowess and spiritual presence in society are legendary. A strictly traditional priest could not officiate unless he was married, and her support was required in his profession.

in our scriptures with those of any other faith, we will immediately discover their elevated status in Hinduism. The Semitic faiths, by comparison, associated women with evil and mortality. The *Old Testament* says, "And a man will choose...any wickedness, but the wickedness of a woman...Sin began with a woman, and thanks to her we all must die" (Ecclesiasticus, 25:18, 19 & 33). The *New Testament*, too, is partial to men: "A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God" (1 Corinthians 11:7). "And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner" (1 Timothy 2:14).

In Hinduism, girls are revered as forms of Goddess Lakshmi. Boys are not correspondingly revered as forms of Rama or Krishna. In the Sindhi, Punjabi, Nepali and other communities, girls are not supposed to touch the feet of their parents; instead, on occasions like Navaratri, everyone—including parents—touch the feet of the girls.

We can inquire, in what major religion besides Hinduism do people worship the Supreme Being as Goddess? While the Western religions are male-centric, the largest pilgrimage site in North India (and second largest in the entire country) is Vaishno Devi. Throughout the country—north, south, east and west—one can see pilgrimage places centered around the shrines of various forms of the Goddess—Durga, Parvati, Kali, Lakshmi, Saraswati, etc. The Shakta Hindus consider the Mother Goddess to be the Supreme Creator; and even Vaishnavites and Saivites, who worship Lord Vishnu or Lord Siva as the Supreme Deity, affirm that God cannot be approached except through His Shakti.

Hindu scriptures are of two classes. *Sruti* is revealed scripture—the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. The *smriti* comprise lesser scriptural texts, composed by human beings—the *Itihasas*, *Puranas* and *Dharmashastras*. Within *smriti*, the *Itihasas* (the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*) are the most important and authoritative. By the time those were written (the "epic period" of India's history), the position of women had deteriorated considerably, although there still existed women called *brahmavadinis*, who devoted their lives to study and spiritual meditation and who participated in the philosophical discussions.



## Women in the Vedas

Many of the Vedic rishis were women. Married and single women alike were acknowledged authorities on the Vedic wisdom. The prophetess Gargi composed several Vedic hymns questioning the origin of all existence. Other Vedic hymns are attributed to Vishwawara, Sikta and others. The *Rig Veda* identifies many women rishis; indeed, it contains dozens of verses accredited to the woman philosopher Ghosha and to the great Maitreyi, who rejected half her husband Yajnavalkya's wealth in favor of spiritual knowledge. It also contains long philosophical conversations between the sage Agasthya and his highly educated wife Lopamudra.

*Rig Veda* clearly proclaims that women

should be given the lead in ruling the nation and in society, and that they should have the same right as sons over the father's property. "The entire world of noble people bows to the glory of the glorious woman so that she enlightens us with knowledge and foresight. She is the leader of society and provides knowledge to everyone. She is symbol of prosperity and daughter of brilliance. May we respect her so that she destroys the tendencies of evil and hatred from the society." (1.48.8)

*Atharva Veda* states that women should be valiant, scholarly, prosperous, intelligent and knowledgeable; they should take part in the legislative chambers and be the protectors of family and society. When a bride enters a

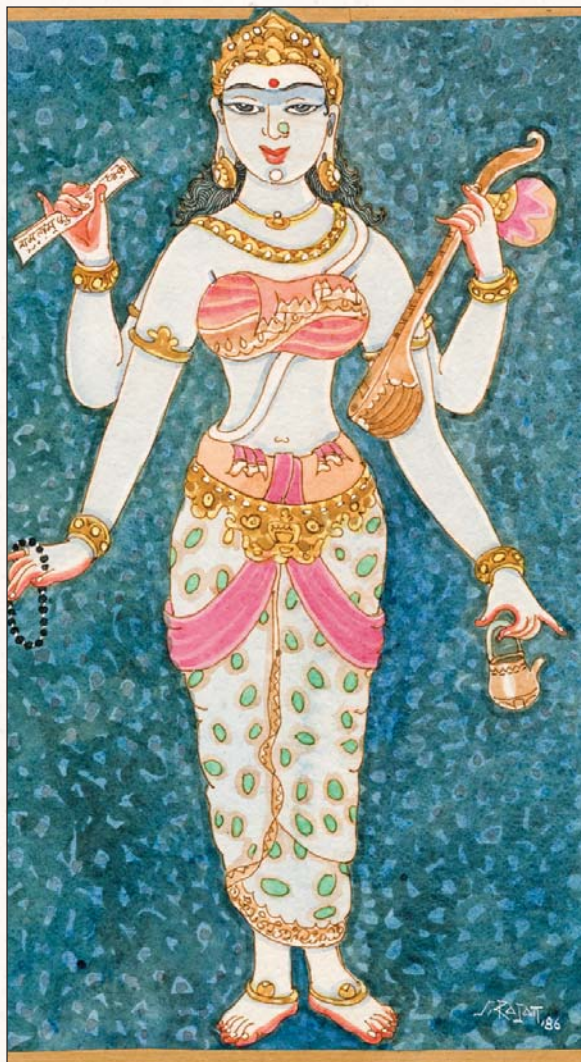


family through marriage, she is to “rule there along with her husband, as a queen, over the other members of the family.” (14.1.43–44)

*Yajur Veda* tells us, “The scholarly woman purifies our lives with her intellect. Through her actions, she purifies our actions. Through her knowledge and action, she promotes virtue and efficient management of society.” (20.84)

### Women in the Upanishads

Each of the four *Vedas* has four parts, the fourth of which comprises its *Upanishads*, which expound the otherwise obscure philosophical meanings. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (part of the *Yajur Veda*) contains an account of a philosophic congress organized by King Janak of Videha. The aforementioned Gargi, one of the eminent participants, challenged the sage Yajnavalkya with questions about the soul which confounded that learned man. Another incident in the same *Upanishad* relates the spiritual teachings given by Yajnavalkya to Maitreyi.



### Women in the Mahabharata

In the epic history *Mahabharata*, the noble prince Bhishma Pitamah declares, “The teacher who teaches true knowledge is more important than ten instructors. The father is more important than ten such teachers of true knowledge and the mother is more important than ten such fathers. There is no greater guru than mother.”

Some people question Draupadi’s having five husbands, considering that to be evidence of inferior status. Does the opposite practice, polygamy, indicate the inferior status of its male practitioners?

By no means should Draupadi be considered subjugated. She did not hesitate to question Yudhishthira Maharaj, something which even his brothers would not do. When the Pandavas captured Ashwattama, who had mercilessly killed all five of Draupadi’s sons in their sleep, Bhima and Krishna wanted to kill him. Despite her unimaginable grief, the compassionate Draupadi did not want another woman to suffer the loss of a child, and her moral strength and determination prevailed over the vengeful men.

Certainly Draupadi, like all humans, had her moments of weakness. The scriptures show the various trials and tribulations in people’s lives. Rather than judging people as right or wrong, good or bad, strong or weak, based on isolated characteristics or events, we should always look at the total picture.

In the *Mahabharata*, Krishna accepted the curse of Gandhari, whose 100 sons were killed on the Kurukshetra battlefield. The bereaved woman blamed Krishna for not stopping the war. Krishna did not rebuke her—he listened respectfully and addressed her as Mother, accepted the curse and departed from the Earth. How can anyone claim that the *Mahabharata* is demeaning to women?

### Women in the Ramayana

Two incidents from the *Ramayana* are frequently cited to indicate the subjugation of women: Sita’s Agni Pariksha, trial by fire, and her banishment to the forest.

In those times, social standards were much stricter than the “anything-goes” attitude common in today’s world. Royalty in particular, unlike politicians today, were held to a high standard. As Rama and Sita were to become king and queen

of Ayodhya, they were obligated to prove, through the Agni Pariksha, that Sita had remained chaste while held in captivity by Ravana.

Sita’s banishment to the forest is described in a section of the *Ramayana* called Uttara Ramayana. This entire section may well be an interpolation, written and inserted much later than Valmiki’s original *Ramayana*, as the language is not consistent with the other parts of the *Ramayana*. Tulsidas and Kampan, the translators into Hindi (*Ramcharit-manas*) and Tamil (*Ramavataram*), do not include the Uttara Ramayana in their translations. But even if we do accept the banishment story, this is simply another incident of royalty being held to a lofty standard, being accountable to their subjects.

Sita is often characterized as submissive, never opposing her husband. Yet when Rama didn’t want her to join him in the forest, she insisted—and prevailed—saying she was well versed in the Vedic tradition, according to which a wife’s place was always with her husband. When Rama attempted to convince her (correctly in this case) that the golden deer was not real, and must be a demon in disguise, Sita would have none of it; she persuaded Rama to go after the deer.

Rama entrusted Lakshmana with the protection of Sita while he chased the deer, but the strong-willed Sita insisted Lakshmana leave her and go to assist Rama. And though she had been categorically told not to cross the Lakshmana Rekha (a protective barrier), she still stepped out in order to feed the hungry guest—who was the demon Ravana in disguise.

Even during the Agni Pariksha, Sita was not meek and submissive. She was angry, and she spoke her mind in no uncertain terms. And finally, she refused the conditions of being reunited with Rama and requested Mother Earth to take her back. In obedience, the Earth opened below her and closed again above her head.

In her wise understanding of dharma, the magnanimous Sita even prevailed upon Hanuman to forgive her tormentors: “Kindness is to be shown by a noble person either towards a sinner or to a virtuous person, or even to a person who deserves death, for there is none who never commits a wrong.” (8.113.46). Perhaps that is why Valmiki, who wrote the *Ramayana*, speaks of it as the “magnificent history of Sita” (“Sitayah charitam Mahat”) (1.4.7).

### Women in the Manu Samhita

The *Manu Samhita*, written long after the Vedic period, is one of the *Dharma Shastras*. Its derogatory statements about women have been highly publicized by those who would denigrate and destroy Hinduism. But *Manu Samhita* is a minor smriti; and while other



ALL ART BY S. RAJAM

**Woman as Goddess & Guardian:** (opposite) Goddess Saraswati, holding scripture, a vina, mala and yogi’s water pot, represents the ideal Indian woman; (above) Artist S. Rajam depicts the Indian home, in which the woman reigns.

sections form the basis for much of Indian law, its sections on women do not.

Manu himself wrote, “Where women are honored, there the Gods are pleased. Where they are not honored, no sacred rite yields rewards,” and “Strike not even with a blossom a woman guilty of a hundred faults.” He insisted that a mother’s wealth is to be inherited solely by her daughters, who also inherit some of the father’s wealth.

### Women in India Today

Social customs vary from age to age and from place to place. India’s customs regarding women were severely impacted by the centuries of invasions and foreign occupation, when the careful protection of Hindu women became essential. All aspects of Indian society have suffered the British-imposed Christian educational system, the

tearing apart of families by proselytizing faiths determined to gain converts by any possible means, and the further disruptions caused by a relatively swift change from a historically stable, largely agrarian society to one intensely focused on manufacturing and technology.

Under the influence of the male-centric Western religions, the role that comes most naturally to most women—wife and mother, the children’s first guru, the Shakti of the home, the preserver and enhancer of the spiritual force field of the home and family—has been effectively disparaged and has become so despised in the mass mind that any reference to it is now perceived as an attempt at subjugation.

Every religion looks to its scriptures and its holy men and women for guidance. What other religion has access to the sort of guidance regarding women that is contained in our revealed Hindu scriptures? What other religion has scriptures that treat women with respect, not to mention reverence—and that speak of God as both male and female (though ultimately neither)? What other religion has female leaders comparable to our great women gurus?

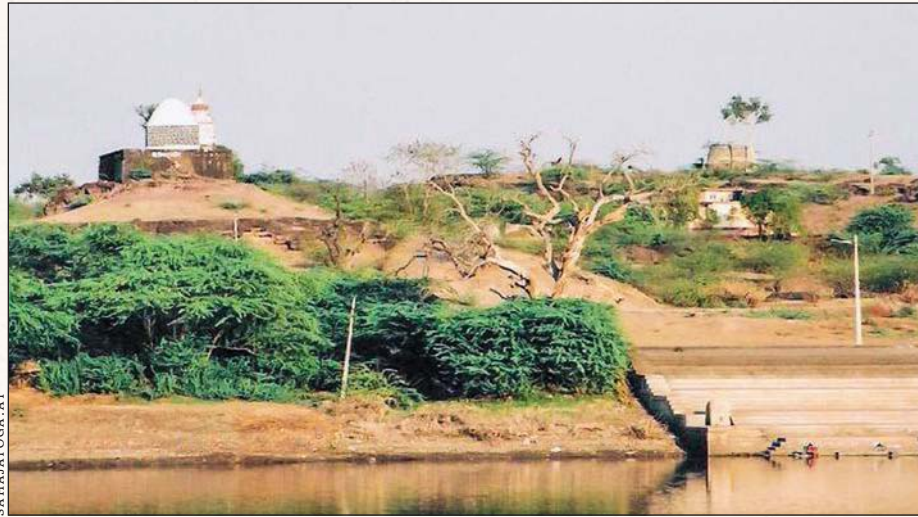
Although the more recently written smriti scriptures show considerable divergence from shruti through the millennia, our revealed holy texts depict the noble place of women in society. As the dawning Sat Yuga returns in its fullness and the entire world comes to appreciate and honor the Sanatana Dharma, we can look forward to the time when women will once again be accorded respect and their rightful place in society—each one revered, whether she chooses to focus on the role of wife and mother or to become a scholar, philosopher, temple priest, medical practitioner, scientist, author, astronaut, artist or stateswoman.

For additional resources and further discussion of women in Hinduism, follow:

[bit.ly/womenindia](http://bit.ly/womenindia)  
[bit.ly/hinduwomen](http://bit.ly/hinduwomen)  
[bit.ly/womenvedic](http://bit.ly/womenvedic)

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SAHAJOGA.AT

PILGRIMAGE

# How Ganesha Became Our Life's Pilot

A devotee shares his experience and the blessings he received at the eight famed temples near Pune

BY DR. J. J. GORDON, SWITZERLAND

IN DECEMBER OF 1997, I FOUND MYSELF IN Mihintale, seven miles from Anuradhapura, a site of immense importance to Sri Lankan Buddhism. Wandering near the principle Dagoba, I saw a simple hand-painted sign, pointing down hill behind the main site, which said "Lord Ganesha Grotto." Despite the fact that I had, until then, considered myself a militant atheist for years, I had always had a fascination with this God whose lovable elephant's head was perched improbably upon a corpulent human body.

When I entered the grotto, upon sight of the murti I became, for a brief moment, both fully conscious and completely unconscious. It was like being struck by lightning, only completely positive. I do not know how long I spent in that grotto; I only know that I grinningly stumbled my way back up the path and tried to explain to my wife what I had experienced: I had found my chosen Deity.

I resolved that upon my return to Europe I would pursue every piece of information I could about Ganesha and bring Him more meaningfully into my life.

The first major publication I obtained was Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's *Loving Ganesha*. I read and re-read this seminal, priceless book countless times. I further developed a considerable library of "Ganapati-alia" and studied many of the major scriptures of Hinduism. I immersed myself not only in the God who revealed Himself to me in that mountain cave in central Sri Lanka, but extended my study to take in Hinduism in general.

It soon became obvious that reading alone was not going to enhance an increasingly spiritual approach to life. All the major Ganesha literature spoke of the Ashtavinayaka Yatra, the holiest Ganesha pilgrimage in all of Hinduism. I fully resolved to undertake this pilgrimage.

NASHIKBAPPA.COM



*Ashtavinayaka Yatra* is Sanskrit for "Eight Vinayaka (i.e., Ganesha) Pilgrimage." It consists of visiting eight temples surrounding Pune, in western India not far from Mumbai. Even with a car, it requires two or three days of gruelling travel over about 1,000 kilometers to reach the eight villages: Morgaon, Siddhatek, Theur, Lenyadri, Ozar, Ranjangaon, Mahad and Pali. All of the murtis at these temples—except one—is a swayambhu or "self-emanating" murti. That is to say that these murtis were all discovered naturally in the form of Ganesha and were not the product of a sculptor's work. It is a difficult pilgrimage but, beyond the normal hazards of

the local traffic, absent of the dangers of high Himalayan ventures.

In December, 2000, my wife and I set off on this pilgrimage at 7AM from Pune. This Maharashtrian city, being centrally located to all the eight temples, is one of the launching points for the pilgrimage. As with the famed six-temple pilgrimage for Lord Murugan in South India, there is a traditional order, though few follow it, as it means backtracking. We did as most pilgrims do and after three hours of rough roads arrived at Sri Oreshwar in the town of Morgaon, which is the first temple of the traditional order. It is considered the holiest and most awakened of

the Ashtavinayaka temples. The swayambhu murti is lovely, in a sitting posture, facing east with a trunk turning left. Diamonds have been embedded to represent its eyes and navel. As with all the Deities of this pilgrimage, it is covered in a thick coating of sandalwood paste that is re-applied several times a day. This builds up over time and then cracks open every century or so—reportedly last in 1788 and 1872—revealing the much smaller, perfectly formed swayambhu murti underneath. The anointing with sandalwood paste then starts all over again. I offered prayers to Lord Ganesha, circumambulated the sanctum and broke a coconut, the traditional offer-

**Ashtavinayaka darshan:** (far left) Crossing the river to the Siddhivinayaka Temple, second of the eight Ganesha temples; (left) Vighnahar Ganapati is the seventh Ganeshas to be visited along the pilgrimage

ing. By comparison to South Indian temples, all those we encountered on the pilgrimage were relatively modest, and this one was vaguely reminiscent of Mogul architecture.

Several more hours on country roads brought us to the banks of the Bhima River, whence we were to board a boat to the opposite shore to reach the village of Siddhatek and the Sri Siddhivinayaka Temple, second in the customary order. You can drive all the way to the temple, but the boat trip is a time-saving, if harrowing, shortcut. The boat was filled with people, animals and motorbikes. If we had been any lower in the water, well, we would have been in the water. But this was business-as-usual and the competent oarsman rowed us across safely.

The small temple is a short walk up a hill. The Ganesha here has His trunk turned to the right, a feature calling for extra care in worship, and as such, this is the one Ashtavinayaka temple where individuals cannot perform their own pujas. Circumambulation was possible, but I wasn't prepared for a three-mile walk barefoot around the hill. Blessed by Sri Siddhivinayaka, we made the trip back across the river without mishap, even though our boat was even more packed.

Our third stop—and the last of this first day—was the closest of the Ashtavinayakas to Pune, Sri Chintamani at Theur, the fifth temple. Ganesha here is heart-shaped and decorated with diamonds in His eyes and navel. Chintamani means "Jewel of Consciousness," and worship of Him is said to free one from all worries and calamities. Indeed, one night not long thereafter my wife Monica muttered in her sleep, "Chintamani is the pilot." When she awoke I asked her what she had been dreaming. She couldn't remember, but it seemed so appropriate that this beautiful representation of Sri Ganesha, the remover of obstacles and worries, should be the pilot of one's destiny. "Chintamani is the pilot" became the catch-phrase of our journey thereafter.

Following a night in Pune, our first stop the next day was the Sri Mahaganapati Temple in Ranjangaon, the eighth temple. Like most of the temples on the Ashtavinayaka pilgrimage, the present external structure of this temple dates from the heyday of the Peshwa rulers—in the late 18th century. However, stone pillars of the older temple, which are visible in the compound, show that there was a place of worship here at least as early as the 9th or 10th centuries. One of the unifying—and most intriguing—characteristics of all the



# How Ganesha Changed My Life

BY EASVAN PARAM, CALIFORNIA

IN 1998, MY WIFE AND I WERE inspired to undertake the Eight Ganesha Pilgrimage to express our gratitude and appreciation for the many boons that we had received in the previous year. We didn't quite know what to expect, as there isn't much available on the subject. Though familiar with the popular pilgrimages of South India, we had never traveled to Maharashtra. We didn't know anyone there and had no contacts upon which to rely. However, from the moment we began planning our trip, and at each step along the way, every door was open, all obstacles vanished and a helping hand was always outstretched.

Never had I made a pilgrimage where the gentle hand of the inner worlds was so easily felt guiding and arranging events. There was an unusual easiness, a calm and unhurried pace to everything. Feeling Lord Vighneshvara with us allowed a patience with circumstances I had never experienced before. I just knew everything was working out for the best, even when our plans changed unexpectedly.

Although each temple was different in some respects, there was a consistent sweetness when approaching the shrine at each. After prostrating, Vinayaka would appear quickly to my inner vision, smile deeply and graciously welcome us saying, "So glad you came. I've been expecting you."

The boons I received from the pilgrimage have remained clear and vivid even as the days and years drift out of sight. I gained the foundation of knowing that the Lord of Dharma is as ever present as a mother's love. I learned that patience and affectionate detachment are based on the unshakable belief that all is as it should be. I now have a friend and life companion who is always there ready to help when needed.

It is difficult to talk about experiences of an inner nature like this without using clichés. Many erudite and unfolded souls have come before and covered the ground so thoroughly. Ultimately, it's not about words. It's about experience and bringing alive in yourself the knowing that Lord Ganesha is always there, just over my shoulder .... just a thought away.



**Cave Temple:** Sri Girijatmaj is worshiped at the fifth temple, in Lenyadri, located in the eighth of 18 ancient Buddhist caves along a mountain cliff

Ashtavinayaka temples is the fact that no one has a clue how long they've been there. The entrance to this shrine is especially large, and the swayambhu murti is most attractive, although local legend maintains that the real murti, consisting of ten trunks and twenty hands, was moved to the cellar at some time in the past due to fear of Muslim invasion.

Sri Vighneshwar Temple at Ozar, the seventh, is 85 kilometers north of Pune. The present temple dates from 1785, and was renovated in 1967. The Deity has emeralds embedded in its eyes and diamonds on its forehead and navel. This is the only Ashtavinayaka temple to possess a golden dome and pinnacle. Our arrival was particularly auspicious. We entered the sanctum just as worship was in progress; tiny finch-like birds flitted in and out between the sanctum and the outer chamber where the devotees had gathered. It was utter magic and I was completely lost in the moment.

The village of Ozar, a small square just outside the entrance to the temple, was, to my mind, the finest of all the village-based Ashtavinayaka temples—a serene and welcoming place, at least when we were there.

Then came the second day's final port of call—the remarkable cave temple at Lenyadri, Sri Girijatmaj, the sixth temple. To reach the entrance, one must climb 307 sheer steps along the cliff face. It is one of 18 formerly Buddhist caves carved deep into the high mountainside. The temple here is exceptional—one large hall carved out of stone leads directly to the sanctum. The swayambhu murti here, like at Siddhatek, emerges directly from the cave wall.

To get to the next Ashtavinayaka temple, Sri Varadvinayaka at Mahad, we had to cross back over the low mountain range that divides the Maharashtrian coast from the inland plain on the third and final pilgrimage day. Sri Varadvinayaka at Mahad, the fourth temple, is the most controversial of the Ashtavinayaka temples for the simple fact that, a few years ago, the trustees decided that the ancient swayambhu murti was too worn to continue using, so they consecrated a carved icon in its place. Some devotees filed a suit against the trustees and, until a court decision is reached, the original Deity sits in front of the sanctum, next to the offering box. I dutifully worshiped both Deities, circumambulated the temple and proceeded to the last of the Ashtavinayaka temples.

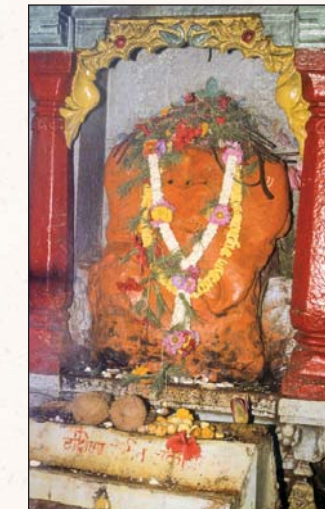
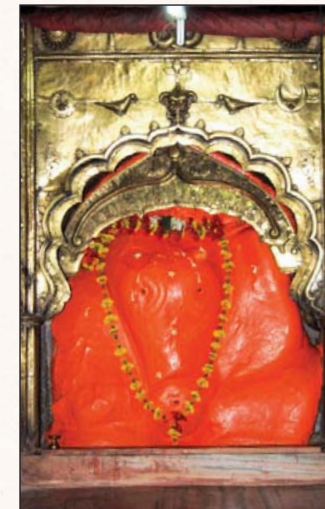
Sri Ballaleswar Temple at Pali, the third, is one of the most distant from Pune. It's the

Sri Ballaleswar Temple at Pali, the third, is one of the most distant from Pune. It's the



**J. J. Gordon**, born in 1962, is a Swiss-British citizen with a Doctorate of Music (London) and Ph.D. (Wales). He was a professor of English at the former Schiller University in Leysin, Switzerland. He is also a journalist, composer, broadcaster and actor who has appeared in numerous films, TV shows and stage performances.

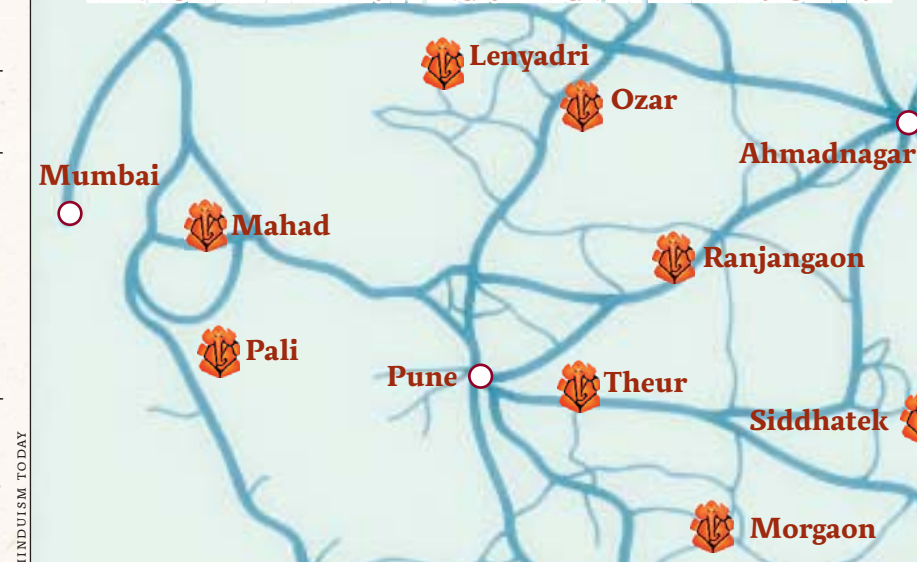
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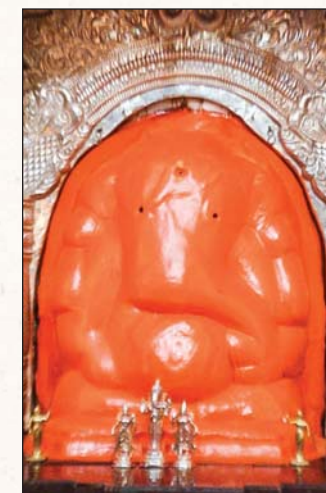
only one of the Ashtavinayaka Temples to be named after the devotee who discovered the swayambhu murti. Some time in antiquity a young boy ("Ballal") at this site became a devout Ganesha devotee. The swayambhu murti at Pali is one of the most characterful—long and "melting" at the shoulders, it wears a crown not unlike a cap and resides in a tall, stone hall with eight stone pillars. It is said that if you make 21 circumambulations around this temple, your problems will be solved and your desires fulfilled.

As we left the site, it struck me that the pilgrimage was over. We had completed my dream and performed the sacred Ashtavinayaka Yatra. I was consumed with a mixture of elation and sadness and deeply overcome. I wanted to start the whole process over again, but I realized that it was the internalization of my experiences that mattered now. All blessings to Vinayaka for allowing me a safe pilgrimage—and the same to those this article might inspire to do likewise! Our Lord Ganapati as Chintamani is, indeed, the pilot of our lives.

## THE ASHTAVINAYAKA PILGRIMAGE IN MAHARASHTRA



**The eight Ganeshas pilgrimage:** (above) Road map of temple locations around Pune, Maharashtra State, India; (top to bottom, left to right) Lord Ganesha as Moreshwar (Morgaon town); Siddhivinayak (Siddhatek); Ballaleshwar (Pali); original Varadvinayak (Mahad); Chintamani (Theur); Girijatmaj (Lenyadri); Vigneshwar (Ozar); and Mahaganapati (Ranjangaon)





# Sarasvati in Japan

Ancient Buddhist monks introduced the Hindu pantheon

**T**HE SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT OF HINDUISM that Buddhism carried along on its historic spread across Asia is not always appreciated. Indian Mahayanist philosophers, such as Nagarjuna, directed Buddhism back towards Hinduism, away from the rigid atheism of Theravada Buddhism. It was Mahayana Buddhism that spread to China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam. As a result, some of the earlier schools in Japan, such as Shingon, Keron and Tendai, had largely Hindu pantheons.

In addition, the Mahayana scriptures are in Sanskrit, unlike the earlier Theravadin canon, which is in Pali. Numerous Sanskrit inscriptions can therefore be seen in Japanese temples, and sometimes on rocks in the mountains. Japanese folk religion is a rich mélange in which a number of Hindu Gods play an important role. For example, of the seven Gods of good fortune whose temples people visit at New Year, three are Hindu: Daikoku (Mahakali), Bishamon (Vaishravana) and Benten, Benzaiten or, most formally, Bensaitensama (Sarasvati). A popular temple at Futako Tamagawa, Tokyo, displays Ganesha far more prominently than the Buddha.

Sarasvati is one of the first Deities recorded in Hinduism, being mentioned numerous times in the *Rig Veda*, as the sacred river on the banks of which the *Veda* was inspired, and as the Goddess who is "inciter of all pleasant songs, inspirer of all gracious thought" and "best mother, best of rivers, best of Goddesses." Sarasvati is now usually seen as the Shakti of Brahma, and the patron Goddess of the arts, learning and music. She is usually shown playing a vina, and sometimes with four arms.

In Japan, Benten is usually shown, rather similarly, as a beautiful woman dressed in the robes of a Chinese aristocrat, playing a *biwa* (a kind of lute) and wearing a jewelled crown. As such, She is instantly recognizable from thousands of television and magazine advertisements, and is perhaps the most



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well-known Japanese Deity. More specifically religious pictures often show Her with multiple arms. She is the Goddess of music, cultured learning and the entertainment-related arts, and also of rivers and water. Most of Benten's temples and shrines are on islands, in rivers and streams, ponds and lakes, or near the sea.

From ancient times, Benten has been identified with the Shinto Goddess of islands, Itsukushima-Hime or Ichikishima-Hime, a minor figure in the oldest Shinto scriptures. In 1870, Shinto and Buddhism were legally separated, and the Shinto clergy have thus stressed this identification so as to continue worshipping Benten at *jinja*, Shinto shrines. Just as in the *Rig Veda* Sarasvati is viewed as

one of a trinity of Goddesses, together with Ila and Bharati or Mahi, in the Shinto classics Itsukushima-Hime is one of a trinity of water Goddesses, together with Tagori-Hime and Tagitsu-Hime, all of whom were formed from the sword of the Sun Goddess. This trinity is worshiped at the Munakata Jinja near Fukuoka, and also at subsidiary jinja.

Although Sarasvati is a river Goddess, Itsukushima-Hime is identified with the offshore island of Miyajima, and Benten is therefore sometimes considered to be a sea Goddess. However, all the marine islands dedicated to Her are close to the land, often joined by bridges or causeways, and the area of tidal flow thus seems to have replaced the flow of the river. She is sometimes associated



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with fishing and sea travel.

Benten has from ancient times been known as Uka-no-Kami in Japan and as the Dragon God in China. She is worshiped as the water Goddess, who is the womb of all things in the universe, and of all reproduction and development. She is the Goddess of happiness and good fortune who blesses business and productivity, controls the fertile harvests of the five cereals and their manifold increase, and brings all things to birth. She is also known as Myooten (fine music Deity), Bionten (beautiful music deity) and Gigeiten (fine arts Deity), and is widely revered as the Goddess who enables the striving for excellence in arts, crafts, technology, music, literature and religion. It all sounds very much like Sarasvati.

Benten is associated with dragons and snakes, especially white snakes. There are numerous stories of Her taking the form of a snake, or marrying a giant snake or sea-dragon, and She is sometimes shown as a human-headed snake or a coiled snake. In Japanese myth and folklore the dragon is associated with rivers and the sea, and in Taoist thought it represents the forces of nature. It is thus possible to understand Benten as the immanent aspect of divinity in nature. Then, if one understands Brahma to be the transcendent aspect of divinity, the perception of Sarasvati as immanent accords well with Her being His Shakti. This makes it possible to see the East Asian nature-oriented religions of Shinto and Taoism as Goddess-oriented forms of devotional Hinduism.

Japan's three most important Benten jinja are Enoshima, Itsukushima and Chikubushima. The small island of Enoshima, connected by a bridge to the mainland near Kamakura, is dedicated to the Munakata trinity. In the jinja there are two statues of Benten, both more than 600 years old, of which one is unclothed and the other eight-armed. The unclothed Benten is milk-white, plays a biwa, and is carved in great detail. She is popular with female entertainers, such as geishas in the past and actresses and pop singers today. The eight-armed Benten holds a sword, a dharma wheel and various other items found in Hindu iconography.

The small island shrine of Itsukushima or Miyajima is a short ferry ride from Hiroshi-



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**Goddess of Enoshima:** (clockwise from left) Japan's eight armed Sarasvati, commonly called "Benten"; Sarasvati in the form of Bensaitensama, at the famed island of Enoshima, near Mount Fuji, playing the lute Enoshino; with Mount Fuji at right, 19th century painting by Hokusai; washing coins and bills in Zeniarai Benten temple spring, as a prayer for prosperity.

ma. The ornate jinja entrance way with sloping sides and flat top, painted red called torii on the beach is one of Japan's most famous sights. Tame deer roam the island. The sacred island of Chikubushima in Lake Biwa has both jinja and Buddhist temples to Her. The lake is sacred to Benten because it is shaped like and named after Her biwa.

There are countless other Buddhist and Shinto shrines and temples in Japan. Among the hills above Kamakura, Zeniarai Benten is in a cave with a stream flowing through it. "Zeniarai" means "penny-washing," and people believe that washing coins there will make them multiply. Deep in the recesses of the cave is a statue of Benten in the form of a snake with a human head.

Other shrines near Tokyo include the temple at Shinobazu Pond, Ueno, in central Tokyo and at Inokashira Pond at Kichijoji (meaning "Lakshmi Temple"), in the western suburbs. It has a Bentendo on a small island reached by two bridges. At Shakujii, a couple of miles

north of Kichijoji, there is Sanpoji Pond, with Itsukushima Jinja on a small island at one end, surrounded by lotuses. The pond is one of the sources of Shakujii River and used to be a place of annual pilgrimage for the rice-farmers living along its banks. For centuries it has been taboo to hunt or collect timber, plants or fuel in or around the pond, and it is now an outstanding nature reserve. At a fork in the road near Shinjuku, Tokyo, there is the tiny Nuke Benten or Ichikishima Jinja, a tiny island surrounded by goldfish-filled ponds. Hakone Jinja on Lake Ashi is a favorite weekend destination for Tokyoites. In the grounds there is an exquisite pond full of carp, with a small Benten shrine on a mossy rock in the middle. There is no bridge, but the floor of the pond is covered with coins thrown in as offerings. At all these shrines, one can sense the continued presence of this Goddess who came from India to bless this land of the rising sun.

By Richard Thornhill, PhD





BOOK REVIEW

# Sciences of the Ancient Hindus

How an author refused to change the term *Hindus* to *Indians* and ended up having to self-publish his compilation of early Hindu scientific achievements

BY ALOK KUMAR, NEW YORK

“THE PRESENT PROPOSAL IS COMMENDABLE in seeking to contribute to understanding the history of Hindu science. But the current proposal is somewhat problematic, especially in light of the deeply contested nature of the adjective *Hindu* and its association with a particular kind of nationalist politics.” Such was one international publisher’s rationale to reject my book, *Sciences of the Ancient Hindus: Unlocking Nature in the Pursuit of Salvation*. It was not an isolated experience; One publisher after another demanded I replace the term *Hindus* with *Indians*. When I refused, the book was rejected. Finally, I had to no option but to self-publish. Upon hearing my tale, the editors of *HINDUISM TODAY* invited me to explain how this book came to be, what it contains and what it means to me.

I was raised in a Hindu family in Haridwar, a holy city known for the Ganges river. My

life has always been focused around my academic interests related to science. I do not have any involvement with the national politics of India, nor do I want to push any political agenda through this book. As a scientist, I have always focused on facts and truth. Therefore, I opted to stick to the term *Hindu*, since for about a millennia, the people who produced the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* were known by this popularized term in nearby regions. The term *India* only became popular in the last 250 years—a period not covered in my book.

My parents taught me that Hindu culture has a long and glorious intellectual tradition. In attempting to learn the details of this tradition, I quickly realized that Hindu accounts of the ancient world are mostly ignored by the West, or simply labeled as biased or wrong. This trend has prevailed in the West for about 250 years. But what about the period that ranges from ancient times to

the beginning of the British colonial period? I decided to collect the earlier Greek, Egyptian, Middle Eastern and European accounts dealing with the ancient Hindus. Among the Greeks I compiled the scientific achievements of the Hindus from the accounts of Aristotle, Arrian, Megasthenes, Clement of Alexandria and Apollonius of Tyana; among Islamic scholars, al-Biruni, al-Khwarizmi, Ibn Labban, al-Fazari, al-Masudi and al-Uqlidisi; among the Chinese, Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang and Yijing; and from Europe, Leonardo Fibonacci, Pope Sylvester II, Roger Bacon, Voltaire and Copernicus.

These accounts presented a much different picture. Even in the modern era, thinkers and scientists as diverse as Goethe, Emerson, Thoreau, Jung, Oppenheimer, Herder and Schrodinger, to name a few, have acknowledged their debt to ancient Hindu achievements in science, technology and philosophy. The mosaic that emerged from this research

**A lasting legacy:** (clockwise from opposite page) the Iron Pillar of Delhi is a 23-foot column, considered a testament to the skill of ancient Indian blacksmiths because of its high resistance to corrosion; the famed “Damascus steel” of the ancient world was actually imported from India; this stone tablet sits near the Deity of Chaturbhuj Temple and possesses the first ever recorded or written form of zero

contrasts sharply with the common portrayal in the popular media and even in academia.

Modern science and medicine would be primitive and unrecognizable without the immense contribution of the ancient Hindus. They invented everyday essentials such as our base-ten number system and the concept of zero as a numeral. They developed the sophisticated system of medicine known as ayurveda, with its mind-body approach; detailed anatomical and surgical knowledge of the human body, including cataract surgery and the so-called plastic surgery. They unfolded metallurgical methods of extraction and purification of metals, including the so-called Damascus blade; knowledge of various constellations and planetary motions that was good enough to assign motion to the Earth; and the science of self-improvement popularly known as yoga. This book covers these topics in detail.

Intellectual curiosity can manifest in any circumstances, but certain conditions are particularly conducive to intellectual growth. India’s vast mineral resources, diverse plant and animal life, favorable climate and sound social ethics provided material prosperity and social stability to the region and fostered the intellectual endeavors of the Hindus. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882 CE), an eminent American philosopher and poet, recognized this when he wrote: “The favor of the climate, making subsistence

easy and encouraging an outdoor life, allows to the Eastern nations a highly intellectual organization—leaving out of view, at present, the genius of Hindus, whom no people have surpassed in the grandeur of their ethical statement.”

Megasthenes (350–290 BCE), an ambassador of Seleucus I, visited the Indus-Saraswati region and reported that the people, “having abundant means of subsistence, exceed in consequence the ordinary stature and are distinguished by their proud bearing. They are also found to be well skilled in the arts, as might be expected of men who inhale a pure air and drink the very finest water.” The Chinese traveling monk Yijing (643–713 CE) made similar observations of the region’s prosperity: “ghee, oil, milk and cream are found everywhere. Such things as cakes and fruit are so abundant that it is difficult to enumerate them here.”

Sa’id al-Andalusi (1029–1070 CE), a natural philosopher from Muslim Spain, wrote a book on the history of science, *Tabaqat al Umam*, in which he categorized nations based on their contributions to science. Al-Andalusi credited India with its leadership in science and technology: “The first nation to have cultivated science is India. This is a powerful nation, having a large population and a rich kingdom. India is known for the wisdom of its people. Over many centuries, all the kings of the past have recognized the ability of the Indians in all branches of knowledge.” This book was popular in medieval Europe. It was first introduced to the English-speaking world in 1991 by myself, titled *Science in the Medieval World*.

The practice of debate was ingrained and highly valued among the Hindus. In fact, it was one of the eight ways to select the groom for a bride. A medical treatise, the *Caraka-Samhita*, emphasizes the role of debate and discussion in the learning process. “Discussion with a person of the same branch



of science increases knowledge and brings happiness. It contributes towards the clarity of understanding, increases dialectical skill, broadcasts reputation and dispels doubts regarding things heard. Hence, it is the discussion with men of the same branch of science that is applauded by the wise.” The *Caraka-Samhita* defines rules for such debate and suggests that we must avoid “celebration for



At world’s center: the Ram Ghat in modern-day Ujjain

## Zero Meridian

TODAY THE GREENWICH OBSERVATORY IN ENGLAND IS CONSIDERED zero meridian, by which the time and longitude of other points on Earth are defined. But during the ancient and medieval periods, Ujjain, an ancient city that still exists in Central India, was considered to be zero meridian by astronomers. Ujjain has a long intellectual history. It was home to King Chandragupta Vikramaditya as well as the famous mathematician and astronomer Brahmagupta and the mathematician Bhaskara. Both Aryabhata and Brahmagupta chose Ujjain as zero degree longitude in their astronomical works.

In Baghdad, al-Khwarizmi compiled a book of astronomical tables, *Zij al-Sindhind*, that was based on the Hindu astronomical system. Following the practice of Hindu astronomers, al-Khwarizmi chose Ujjain as zero meridian. A translated copy of this book was quite popular in medieval Europe.





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**Great minds:** Aryabhata was a great mathematician and astronomer. He assigned diurnal motion to the Earth, with the Sun held stationary, long before his Western counterparts. His written works include the Arya-Bhātiya and the Arya-Siddhanta.

the victor” or “any insult to the loser.” These detailed rules of *shastrarth* (debate), as defined in the text, predate the similar guidelines in the West’s nineteenth-century *Robert’s Rules of Order* by two millennia.

The ancient Hindus memorized their literature verbatim. The spoken words, not the written words, have been the basis of literary and scientific traditions of the Hindus. The people who memorized the texts, mostly in rhythmic hymns, were highly respected, as they became the tools that kept the tradition alive. Special classes of people who memorized these books were defined: *Vedi*, *Dvivedi*, *Trivedi* and *Chaturvedi* are popular last names among the Hindus. Initially

these names signified the number of *Vedas* the person memorized. Yijing writes: “The *Vedas* have been handed down from mouth to mouth—not transcribed on paper or leaves. In every generation there exist some intelligent Brahmins who can recite 100,000 verses. This is far from being a myth, for I myself have met such men.”

al-Biruni, an Islamic scholar who lived in India for some thirteen years during the eleventh century, wrote of the importance of poetic literature among the Hindus in popularizing science: “By composing their books in metres the Hindus intend to facilitate their being learned by heart and to prevent people in all questions of science from ever recurring to a written text, save in case of bare necessity. For they think that the mind of man sympathizes with everything in which there is symmetry and order and has an aversion to everything in which there is no order. Therefore, most Hindus are passionately fond of their verses and are always desirous of reciting them, even if they do not understand the meaning of words, and the audience will snap their fingers in token of joy and applause. Hindus do not want prose compositions, although it is much easier to understand them.”

The sciences of the ancient Hindus were an essential and integral part of their religion. The disciplines of astronomy, mathematics, chemistry, physics, yoga and medicine were all practiced to meet the needs of religion, as well as to fulfill natural curiosity. Unlike the members of some religions, Hindus have never had to make a choice between science and religion.

In the *Chandogya Upanishad*, astronomy, mathematics, logic, history, grammar and fine arts are considered useful in order to know the ultimate truth. Thus, astronomy, logic, mathematics and history became tools to achieve *moksha* (liberation from rebirth). This intellectual environment, in which an accurate understanding of the universe was considered useful to spiritual progress, allowed the natural sciences to prosper.

Aryabhata (476–550 CE), the great mathematician-astronomer, assigned diurnal motion to the Earth and kept the sun stationary in his astronomical scheme. He taught that the stars’ appearance of movement in the sky is an illusion. To explain the apparent motion of the sun as observed from the earth, he used the analogy of a boat in a river: “As a man in a boat going forward sees a stationary object moving backward, just so in Sri Lanka a man sees the stationary asterisms (stars) moving backward exactly toward the West.” About a millennium later, Copernicus used a similar argument to explain the motion of the earth.

The Sanskrit term *yoga* means “union” or

“join.” To some this implies the union of our physical self (body) and mind; to others, a union of personal self with the Divine. In either case a person transcends everyday mundane existence to achieve his/her fullest potential that leads to *moksha*—an ultimate goal for all Hindus. Body and mind are the joined pair that create synergy for this ultimate goal. Yoga is perhaps the oldest effective system of personal development for this purpose.

Yoga is an outcome of biomimicry practiced by the ancient Hindus. They observed various life forms, small and big—their life styles, the ways they exercised, the ways they cured themselves, the ways they relaxed and the ways they avoided sickness. These studies also evolved into a system of medicine called *ayurveda*.

In writing this book—glimpsed here through these few examples—I hoped to promote more scholarship on the subject, leading to a deeper understanding of the original scriptures. Another intent was to bring the Hindus’ heritage closer to the mainstream knowledge that is taught in academia.

This field needs the influx of young scholars. It is the responsibility of all generations to collect knowledge of the previous generations, add to this knowledge and pass it along to the next generation. This is what I have tried to accomplish. Only the readers can judge my humble effort.

Order at: [bit.ly/sciencesancienthindu](http://bit.ly/sciencesancienthindu)



Alok Kumar, born in India, is a professor of physics at the State University of New York at Oswego. Kumar has received the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching and the President’s Award for Creative and Scholarly Activity and Research. He has more than 65 refereed research publications and is active in the fields of atomic physics, chemical physics, history of science, and science education.  
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Mosum Shah, University of Chicago, 2013 HAF Congressional Intern

## Education

HAF’s Hinduism 101 Training was an amazing and succinct learning experience. Our school textbooks do a poor job of explaining Hinduism. HAF is fixing that by educating our teachers about Hinduism so that they can do a better job of teaching about it at school. Now that I have taken the training, I finally understand how to educate those who are interested in learning more about Hinduism!

Hindu American High School Student, 11th Grade, Texas



## Human Rights

HAF came as the light at the end of the tunnel for the Bhutanese American Organization Philadelphia (BAOP) and all the Bhutanese in general. We were lost at the crossroads of language, culture and spirituality when the Hindu American Foundation came ready to help us walk down the difficult path of keeping our roots intact. HAF rekindled hope when we were hopeless.

Leela Kuikel, Executive Director, Bhutanese American Organization Philadelphia



## Interfaith

Thanks to the Hindu American Foundation, communities throughout the US have not only come to a deeper understanding of Hinduism, but have benefited from their participation, which has led to stronger interfaith alliances, where the many paths have been honored on the journey toward one truth.

Steve Spreitzer, President and CEO, Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion



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# Hindu Heritage Endowment

## DURABLE POWER OF ATTORNEY: WHEN YOU DO NEED TO GIVE OTHERS CONTROL OF YOUR PROPERTY

“Are you out of your mind?” So thought Aditya—a well-traveled engineer in his forties with an international client base—when his attorney first suggested he name someone to control his bank accounts, make his mortgage payments and complete and sign his taxes.

Too polite to speak his misgivings, Aditya revealed them in his face. “No, no. I’m not asking you to give away the store,” the attorney assured with a smile. “These powers would spring to life only when you need them.”

“For example, let’s say you had a serious accident on one of your trips. Doctors confirm you can’t manage your finances for a while. If you have completed a durable power of attorney for property management and finance, someone you have chosen could immediately pay your medical bills and mortgage.”

“Without it, the court would have to appoint a conservator for you,” the attorney said with a grimace. “That’s called, logically enough, a court conservatorship. In some cases it’s the only solution, but, believe me, you want to avoid it if you can. It’s expensive and unpleasant. After all, they have to discuss your mental competence in public, and in the end they may appoint someone you would not want.”

“‘Power of attorney’ does not imply an actual attorney. Attorney is used in the broad sense of someone acting in your place and on your behalf, not an attorney-at-law, like me.”

“How important is this document? Well, once after I had given an estate planning seminar and reviewed the tools of the trade, an emergency-room nurse who was in the audience spoke up. ‘Accidents happen. Everyone should have a durable power of attorney for property management, no matter what your age, if you own property and have bills.’”

“It can be a long document, depending on what you want your representative to do,” the attorney said. “But this is typical,” he added, handing Aditya something that looked like an accountant’s to-do list. It read:

- Make deposits and withdrawals from bank accounts
- Sign tax returns and appoint qualified individuals to represent the principal with the IRS in order to make investment decisions
- Deal with retirement plans, including IRAs
- Have access to the principal’s safe-deposit box
- Create a living trust and fund a previously created living trust
- Revoke or change beneficiary designations
- Vote the principal’s stock
- Forgive or collect the principal’s debts
- Enter into contracts on behalf of the principal
- Make gifts on behalf of the principal
- Disclaim gifts or bequests made to the principal
- Deal with life insurance on the life of the principal

There were a few people, very few, to whom Aditya would give these powers. He did not relish a judge he did not know making that choice for him.

“Let’s get it drafted,” he declared firmly.

For more information on durable powers of attorney for property management and finance, visit the HHE Web site, [hhe@hindu.org](mailto:hhe@hindu.org), and click on Gift Planning, then Estate Planning, and then Your Power of Attorney.



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<b>Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment</b>		<b>Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund</b>		Dasan Mahadevan	101.00	Sasikumar Darmalingam	30.00
Anonymous	150.00	Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00	Thulasidas Nadarajah	75.00	Michael R. Eisen	25.00
Sharad & Namrata Haldwania	301.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	19.05	Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00	Susan Flynn	25.00
Dheeraj Handa	101.00	Carmen Debora Murbach	450.00	Cassan Pancham	150.00	Thamby Kumaran	40.00
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Gayatri Rajan	75.00	Toshadevi Nataraj	100.00	Mrunal Patel	1,008.00	Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01
Chamundi Sabanathan	75.00	Barathy Sockanathan	15.39	Aran Sambandar	162.00	Purany Ponniiah	50.00
Other Donations	62,807.44	Vayudeva Varadan	54.00	Hitesvara Saravan	108.00	Muthu Senthilkumar	101.00
Total	63,884.44	Anonymous	46.18	Tejasinha Sivalingam	12.00	Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	157.00
		Other Donations	4,800.00	Ganga Sivanathan	108.00	Andrew Stich	300.00
		Total	5,684.64	Anba Dayananden Valayten	12.38	Soma Sundaram	5.00
				Vayudeva Varadan	63.00	Total	3,392.82
<b>Iraivan Temple Endowment</b>				Shama Vinayaga	180.96		
Frank Burkhardt	30.00			Raja Vishnu	95.00	<b>Siva Poomi School Trust</b>	
Anonymous	10,030.00	<b>Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam</b>	624.00	Michael Wasylikiw	648.00	Anonymous	300.00
Amrit Gohil	150.00	Anonymous		Total	8,510.79		
Prabodh & Jean Gupta	100.00					<b>Kodiswara Satguru Malaysia Travel Fund</b>	
Dheeraj Handa	303.00	<b>Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund</b>	324.00			Siva Jothiswary	150.00
Victoria Lynne Johnson	11.00	Anonymous					
Rasik Patel	251.00	<b>Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund</b>		<b>Saivite Hindu Scriptural Fund for the Visually Impaired</b>			
Ganga Sivanathan	216.00	Anonymous	300.00	Rajendra Giri	110.00	<b>India Hindu Tribals Endowment</b>	
Other Donations	42,735.77	Nagapoorani Kanagasingam	50.00			Kamalesh & Krishna Gangopadhyay	28,000.00
Total	53,826.77	Total	350.00	<b>Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund</b>	150.00		
				Pathmini Saravanapavan		<b>Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund</b>	
<b>Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund</b>		<b>Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment</b>				Vayudeva Varadan	54.00
Anonymous	2,025.60	Anonymous	108.00				
Thirujnanam Arnasalon	18.95	Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00	<b>Manitha Neyam Trust Fund</b>	150.00		
Anil Ananda Badhwar	9.00	Total	183.00	Bala Sivaceyon	50.00		
Peter Tracy Balogh	162.00			Nutanaya Sivaceyon	10.00	<b>Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund</b>	
Hemakheshaa Naatha Batumallah	14.00	<b>Hinduism Today Production Fund</b>		Total	210.00	AmazonSmile Foundation	70.35
Mekaladeva Batumallah	14.00	Ron & Jennifer Burke	150.00			<b>Rani Jothiswarar Memorial Fund</b>	
Tarakini Gunasegaran	15.00	P.C. Ghosh	90.00	<b>Tiptur Shiva Temple &amp; Youth Hostel Fund</b>	10.00	Kodisvara Jothiswarar	150.00
Victoria Lynne Johnson	11.00	Hiranya Gowda	93.00	Bala Sivaceyon			
Juhivaasana Koothan	9.53	Mahendra & Rohini Jagirdar	250.00			<b>Ramanathaswamy Temple Cleaning Fund</b>	
Anil Kumar	9.00	Anonymous	1,108.09	<b>Mahajana College Fund</b>	200.00	Danyse Crotti	150.00
Punithavathi Kuppusamy	10.00	Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Ambasuthan Jananayagam		Hiranya Gowda	99.00
Jogendra Moorogoen	4.73	Gayatri Rajan	75.00			Kulagan Moonesawmy	19.05
Vidyadevi Moorogoen	4.73	Total	1,816.10	<b>Kerala Temple Trust</b>	7.00	Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00
Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00			Michael Zimmermann		Ganga Sivanathan	108.00
Lok & Pushpa Nath	21.00	<b>Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund</b>				Total	436.05
Bijamati Pareatumbbee	20.00	Anthony Buckland	108.00	<b>Taos Hanuman Fund</b>	46.18	<b>Anantha Ladies Home Endowment</b>	
Padmini Pareatumbbee	3.13	Roshan Harilela	375.00	Anonymous		Michael R. Eisen	25.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98	Pankaj N. Lalaji	500.00			Natraj Narayanswami	11.00
Chinmayie Rajasankara	7.50	Natraj Narayanswami	11.00	<b>Kapaleeshwara Temple Orphanage</b>	110.00	Anonymous	235.73
Thangaratnam Sanmugam	165.00	Anonymous	50.00	Rajendra Giri	25.00	Total	271.73
Som Sharma	101.00	Chamundi Sabanathan	75.00	Anonymous	135.00		
Hemavalli Sivalingam	1.88	Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00			<b>Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment</b>	
Padminidevi Umakanthan	84.00	Total	1,149.00	<b>Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund</b>	50.00	Microsoft Matching Gifts Program	125.00
Total	2,821.03			Saurabh Pathak		Rama & Abhaya Balaraman	1,001.00
		<b>Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund</b>				Anonymous	33.00
		Ravi Alagar	499.00	<b>Hindu Education Endowment</b>		Dheeraj Handa	102.00
		Vipin & Bela Bhatt-Koshal	499.00	Rajendra Giri	110.00	Kishore Krishna	125.00
		Darlene Bolesny	120.00	Hasu N. & Hansa H. Patel	100.00	Natraj Narayanswami	11.00
		Srinivas Bolisetty	499.00	Total	210.00	Anonymous	25.00
		Yuvrajsinh Chavda	499.00	<b>Hindu Press International Endowment Fund</b>		Prathiba Ramadoss	150.00
		Navin H. Doshi	499.00	Hiranya Gowda	63.00	Anonymous	25.00
		Sudarshan Jadcherla	499.00			Total	311.00
		Souda Koothan	189.52	<b>Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund</b>		<b>Sri Ganesha Hindu Temple of Utah Endowment Fund</b>	
		Gail La Mar	499.00	Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00	Michael R. Eisen	25.00
		Sivakavinian Moonesawmy	75.00	Gassa Patten	1,350.00	Alfiya Khasanova	100.00
		Bhaveshan Moorghen	9.48	Total	1,575.00	Total	125.00
		Shanda Kumaran Moorghen	9.48	<b>Saiva Agamas Trust</b>			
		Udeyadeva Moorghen	9.48	Ganga Sivanathan	108.00		
		Raman Muthukrishnan	499.00			<b>Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment</b>	
		Jaiprakash Patel	499.00			Anonymous	300.00
		Anjeeni Devi Peruman	63.51	<b>Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment</b>		Canaganayagam Kugendra	80.00
		Kirtideva Peruman	28.58	Anil Ananda Badhwar	9.00	Total	380.00
		Niroshnee Peruman	33.34	Anil Kumar	9.00		
		Wayne Reynolds	100.00	Total	18.00	<b>Hindu Literature Fund</b>	
		Mata Saraswati	500.00			John & Abha Wiersba	153.00
		Abhinandan Sharma	299.00	<b>Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund</b>			
		Sai Singh	120.00	Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00	<b>Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund</b>	
		Potriyan Sivanathan	18.78			Hiranya Gowda	153.00
		Randall Summerisle	499.00	<b>Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund</b>		Rajagopal Krishnan	40.00
		Rajagopala Rao Tripuraneni	499.00	Anonymous	150.00	Total	193.00
		Amar Jyoti Yogi Raj	299.00	<b>Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund</b>		<b>Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund</b>	
		Total	7,364.17	Rajadeva Alahan	153.00	Anonymous	150.00
						Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00
		<b>Gurudeva's Trilogy Distribution Fund</b>		<b>A. Saravanapavan Family Murugan Temple Pillaiyar Shrine Fund</b>		Total	183.00
		Vel Mahalingum	19.05	Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00		
				<b>Thank You Bodhinatha Fund</b>		<b>Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund</b>	
		<b>Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment</b>		Anonymous	3,045.45	Victoria Lynne Johnson	3.00
		Aravindraj Chandrasekaran	9.00	Hotranatha Ajaya	33.00		
		Devajyothi Kondapi	153.00	Peter Tracy Balogh	51.00	<b>Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment</b>	
		Umasankaran Mohambourame	153.00	Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai	432.00	Anonymous	2,160.81
		Gowri Nadason	167.02	Susan Flynn	25.00	Marlene Carter	162.00
		Parimala Selvaraj	124.00	Debashis Ghosh	300.00	Sunil Chacko	265.00
		Bala Sivaceyon	30.00	Harsh Gopal	251.00		
		Anonymous	46.18	Pola Madupu	499.00		
		Total	682.20				

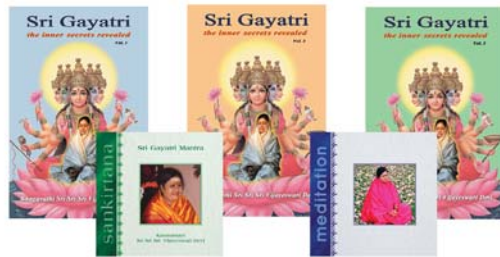
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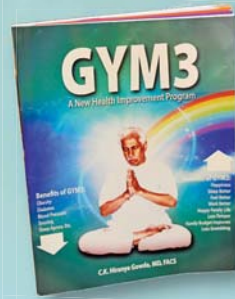
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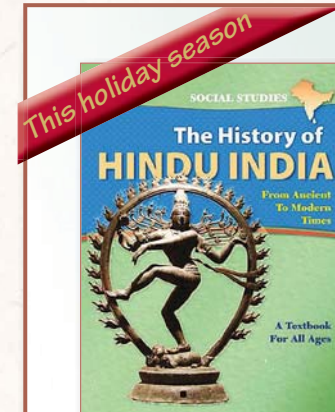
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Born into a traditional Hindu lineage of astrologers in South India, Chakrapani began his training at an early age and enjoyed associations with many of India's most revered and celebrated saints and sages. With over 45 years of experience, his depth of knowledge and unique understanding of how astrological principles apply to different cultures are sought out by people from all over the world. For more information and a schedule of his upcoming itinerary, please contact:

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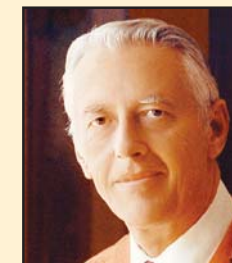
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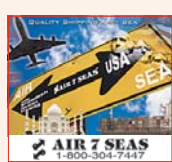
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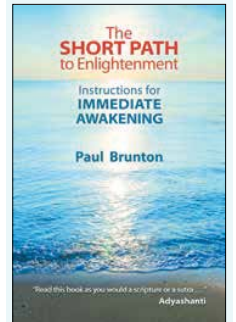
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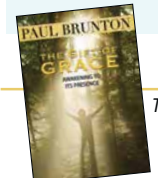


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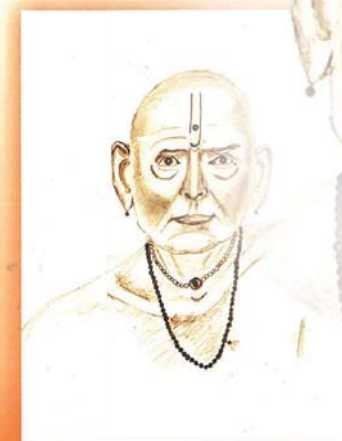
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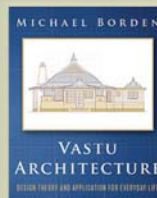
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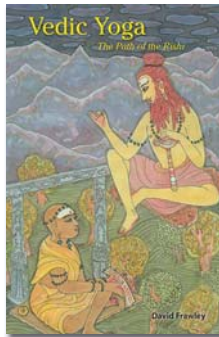
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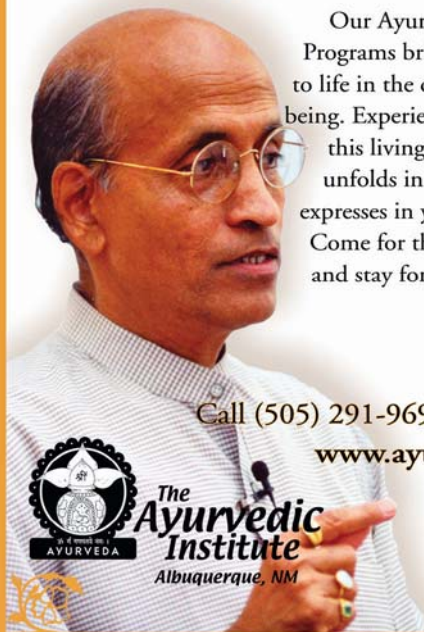


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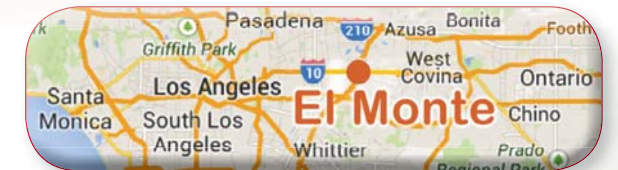
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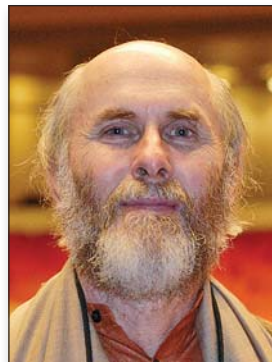
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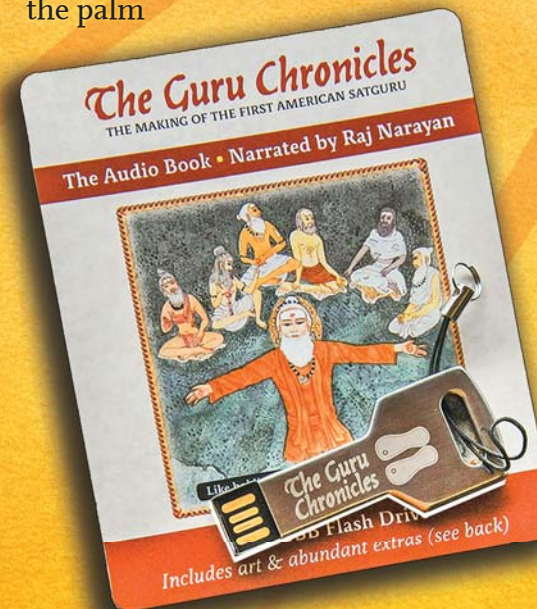
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**Priceless:** Ancient temples, like the Boramdeo Temple in Chhattisgarh, are often in need of protection and repairs

Though some of the films contain inadequate or illegible English subtitles, the majority of them are well conveyed and offer unique and artful perspectives from their creators. In one example (#9 in the playlist), the film tells the story of four boys that pick up an unusual hitchhiker, who later opens their eyes to the significance of traditional temple architecture, particularly in terms of harnessing cosmic energies. All this is conveyed through a delightful story, as opposed to a bland documentary. However, those that do take the documentary approach do a good job. The series is a testament to the quality of independent films in India, and does well presenting its many important issues.

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While the free version of the app gives you temple names, addresses and websites, the paid version provides you with single-click driving directions, hours, contact information and more. It lets users save their temple details offline, so if they are traveling they don't have to worry about reloading information on the go. Users can also register and leave comments and add photos to temple pages, thereby improving the information experience for other users. The funds raised by the \$1.99 price for the paid version go towards running the All Hindu Temples website as well as the expansion of the worldwide temple database. Future plans include a release for Android as well as an expansion of the database's Indian temples.

The application's creator, Hari Iyer, told



**A world of temples:** This map shows the many temples in the application's database

HINDUISM TODAY about his inspiration:

"It all started one day when my wife and I visited a local temple only to find it closed. I had tried to get their hours, but couldn't find anything useful. Finally my wife and I had to pray from outside. I later checked online and found that they, as well as many other temples, didn't provide any basic information such as hours or contact information.

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